
**HERMENEUTICS,
AUTHORITY
and
CANON**

edited by
D. A. Carson
and
John D. Woodbridge

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Moisés Silva is Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is a graduate of Bob Jones University (B.A.), Westminster Theological Seminary (B.D., Th.M.), and the University of Manchester (Ph.D.). He also did graduate work in Semitics at Dropsie University. Prior to his present position he taught for nine years at Westmont College, where he also served as chairman of the Department of Religious Studies. He has written two books--*New Testament Survey* and *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*--and some periodical articles. He is the editor of the *Westminster Theological Journal* and a member of the Society of Biblical Literature and the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLACE OF HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION IN NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM

Not long ago, a biblical scholar polemicized against the doctrine of inerrancy by stating that the Bible is not a history textbook. I have heard that argument before, but all the same it reflects considerable naivete with regard to how the doctrine of inerrancy is understood by those who hold to it. This particular scholar gave the distinct impression that, in his opinion, people holding to that doctrine have not given much thought to the character and purpose of the Bible. Surely he appeared to reason-if we could briefly educate them on this issue, they will abandon their view of an inerrant Bible. How might he react if he knew that students in Fundamentalist schools are routinely warned not to misuse the Bible by treating it as a textbook for history, science, etc.?¹

But then a related question comes to mind: To what extent have misunderstandings created unnecessary conflicts between a conservative and a nonconservative approach to critical questions? If the scholar mentioned above had understood that all responsible formulations of biblical inerrancy have emphasized that the Bible is *not* to be read as a scientific treatise, he might have discovered that at least some of his concerns were unnecessary. Conversely, those Evangelicals who take seriously their position that the Bible is not an academic textbook will discover that their suspicions of higher-critical methods and conclusions are not always well-founded.

It may be worth our while, therefore, to inquire more particularly whether the debates that arise from attempts to *reconstruct* biblical history are vitiated by misunderstandings on the part of both conservatives and nonconservatives. It would be a monumental error, of course, to suggest that the differences between these two groups can be reduced to a question of semantics. One cannot wish away the fundamental antithesis between a scholar who affirms that indeed *all* of Scripture is God's very breath (2Ti 3:16) and one who does not. Accordingly, this essay is not an attempt to minimize the differences, but to clarify them-not an effort to eliminate polemics, but to make sure that the debate focuses on the real issues.

I. THE TASK OF HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

At the outset, some comments are necessary about the very concept of historical reconstruction. The term *reconstruction* suggests to many Evangelicals that the biblical data are being regarded as deficient and are therefore in need of revision. But this word need not be taken in a pejorative sense. Indeed, historical reconstruction is one of the favorite pastimes among Evangelicals, for that is precisely what goes on when a student seeks to harmonize two narratives.

For example, even an unsophisticated Bible student will notice, sooner or later, that the order of Christ's temptations in Matthew 4:1–11 differs from that given in Luke 4:1–12. Both Evangelists agree on the *first* temptation (stones to bread), but what Matthew gives as the second (the pinnacle of the temple) appears as the third in Luke. Here our student is faced with a *formal* contradiction (that is, an "apparent discrepancy," to use a common label); he or she wants to know whether it is also a *material* (or "real") contradiction. The moment we ask "What was the actual order of events?" we are involved in historical reconstruction. Of course, several approaches are possible:

- (1) There were really four temptations, with the second repeated after the third. (I have never seen this solution proposed, but it is not qualitatively different from certain other extreme attempts at harmonization.)
- (2) Matthew gives the actual order, as suggested by *tote* "then" and *palin* "again" (4:5,8; contrast *kai* and *de in* Lk 4:5,9). Luke was not interested in the chronological question but wanted to emphasize the dramatic character of the second temptation and so put it at the end. (This is the most common conservative solution.)²
- (3) The question cannot really be answered from the texts and is somewhat irrelevant anyway, for *neither* Evangelist appears to be concerned with chronological issues.³
- (4) The narrative may be "the distillation of a conflict Jesus experienced again and again throughout his ministry."⁴ Perhaps they were visionary experiences that cannot be adequately handled under the rubric of historicity.
- (5) The story is laden with supernatural elements beyond the reach of the historian; the account is, therefore, legendary, with little or no basis in fact.

Most readers of this study will find reconstructions (1) and (5) unacceptable. Option (4), though adopted by some Evangelicals, is generally avoided in the conservative camp. Either (2) or (3) would be

viewed as clearly compatible with biblical inerrancy, but option (3) in particular helps us to identify the nature of our difficulty, namely, *uncertainty due to incomplete information*. For some conservative Christians, certainty about historical details appears to be inseparable from a high view of Scripture. Such a connection is valid, however, only where Scripture speaks directly and unambiguously on the historical question involved.

Hardly anything is more crucial to the Christian faith than the historicity of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, yet no one knows for sure the date of Jesus' birth nor the year of His death and resurrection. Because biblical information regarding the time of Jesus' birth is *incomplete*, Evangelicals accept the reality of *uncertainty* on that issue. Any attempts to fill the gaps in our knowledge, to collect other kinds of evidence, to draw inferences, and to synthesize the results of this research by theorizing when Jesus may have been born--this is historical reconstruction.

Most Evangelicals, then, would agree that historical statements asserted in the Bible may be incomplete but not false. A more delicate question arises when it is suggested that incomplete information, in the very nature of the case, is defective and inevitably distorts the picture. This inference, however, is legitimate only when the given information is put to a use different from that intended by the writer. An architect might regard Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders (Mt 7:24–27) as "defective" if one treats the passage as a manual for the construction of skyscrapers. Some nonconservatives are too quick to use terms like "inadequate" and "faulty" when describing biblical information that was written down with a purpose quite different from that for which they are using it.

Sometimes, however, conservatives are equally at fault in neglecting the purpose of specific portions of Scripture. If a narrative in the Bible has a clear polemic intent, we can hardly treat it as we might treat an encyclopedia article. Take, for example, the figure of Herod Agrippa I. He appears in Scripture only in Acts 12, where we read that he (1) executed James, (2) imprisoned Peter, (3) executed the soldiers assigned to guard Peter, (4) accepted the blasphemous compliments of the Phoenician representatives, and (5) was struck down by an angel of the Lord. If this is all we know about Herod Agrippa I, and if we assume that the narrative is intended to give a balanced assessment of the king's total administration, we will conclude that the man was a monster.

In fact, however, Agrippa's three-year reign over Judea was regarded by the people as incomparably better than the rule they had experienced under Herod the Great, Archelaus, and the Roman governors. Josephus tells us that Agrippa "had a gentle disposition and he was a benefactor to all [Jews and Gentiles] alike. He was benevolent to those of other nations and exhibited his generosity to

them also.” In dealing with an opponent “he considered mildness a more royal trait than passion, and was convinced that considerate behavior is more becoming in the great than wrath.”⁵ No doubt for reasons of political expediency, Agrippa favored the Pharisees, conformed to the Jewish customs, and treated the people well. The spread of Christianity threatened his plans, however, and so he attempted to crush the church; in his pride he took upon himself the glory that belongs to God, and the divine judgment upon him was swift. The facts affirmed in Acts 12 are correct and also adequate to the writer’s purpose, but they are “inadequate” for a modern historian who seeks to provide a total picture of Agrippa’s reign. It would be wrong to deny the accuracy of Josephus’ account (which does not really contradict Acts) or to reject a historical reconstruction that seems to put Agrippa in a better light than Acts does. But it is not less objectionable to describe the account in Acts as erroneous or untrustworthy simply because the information is incomplete and slanted toward the particular purpose of that book.

These introductory comments have focused on three examples that present relatively minor problems: the order of Jesus’ temptation, the precise dates of Jesus’ birth and death, and the evaluation of Agrippa’s reign. They are “minor” problems because they have little effect on fundamental questions. Thus, whether we date Jesus’ crucifixion in A.D. 30 or 33 does not significantly alter any basic element of biblical history (that Jesus did die under Pontius Pilate during Passover week), nor does it alter the theological implications of that history. If I may assume agreement with the salient points of the discussion so far, we may move on to historical issues of greater moment.

II. RECONSTRUCTING FIRST-CENTURY PHARISAISM

A. THE PROBLEM

Our first major problem area not only affects a significant historical question regarding the social and religious setting of the New Testament; it also raises doubts concerning the trustworthiness of Jesus’ teaching as recorded in the Gospels. I refer to the New Testament depiction of the Pharisees. On the basis of the Gospel narratives, many conservative Christians have formed a wholly negative impression of first-century Judaism, especially as represented by the Pharisees. If John the Baptist called them vipers (Mt 3:7) and Jesus referred to them as hypocrites (Mt 23:13,15, etc.); if they performed religious duties for show (Mt 23:5–7), were full of greed (v 25), and placed obstacles on those who sought to enter the kingdom (v 13); if they plotted Jesus’ death and were thus instrumental in having Him crucified (Mk 3:6; Jn 11:47–53; 18:3)—if all this and

more is true, then apparently these Jewish leaders had no redeeming qualities. Accordingly, the usual modern conception or *reconstruction* of the Pharisees is that of a self-righteous group, full of pride and wickedness, parading an external show of religion, misinterpreters of the law who oppressed the common folk with their unreasonable legalism.

To be sure, a careful reader of the Gospel material will notice some items that conflict with such a reconstruction. In Matthew 23:3, for example, Jesus appears to commend the teaching of the Pharisees (though the meaning of this verse is debated). Again, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Lk 18:9–14), while it condemns the Pharisee, makes sense only if we appreciate the role reversal it implies: the wicked publican, not the one *generally regarded as righteous, goes home justified*. But these and other elements have traditionally been ignored in conservative reconstructions of Pharisaic Judaism. For example, a Bible dictionary widely used in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries says of the Pharisees that “they had in Christ’s day degenerated largely into a self-conscious and formal religiosity” that made piety dependent on “ritual rather than moral” acts. We are further told that “pride and hypocrisy were their prominent characteristics,” and they were “the slaves of lust, and avarice, and pride.”⁶ A recent and very popular reference work characterizes Pharisaism (in contrast to Christianity) with five points: (1) the Pharisees taught “a servile adherence to the letter of the law,” so that its moral precepts were undermined; (2) “the Pharisees multiplied minute precepts,” so that “the law was almost, if not wholly, lost sight of”; (3) they “undervalued and neglected the “inward spirit” and “great rules of life,” so that “the idea of religion as that which should have its seat in the heart disappeared”; (4) they “sought mainly to attract attention and excite the admiration of men”; and (5) they “made a prey of the friendless” and “were in reality avaricious, sensual, and dissolute.”+

Contrast these descriptions to that found in a highly regarded non-Evangelical Bible dictionary, which argues that the negative view of the Pharisees “is being corrected by scientific research, both Christian and Jewish.” “A wide historical study discovers moral dignity and greatness in Pharisaism.” In contrast to the exclusiveness of the priesthood, “the Pharisees and the Scribes opened a great career to all the talents.” When a reader “notes the striking freedom of the New Testament from ritualistic and sacerdotal ideas, he should give credit to Pharisaism as one of the historical forces which made these supreme qualities possible.”⁸ This positive reinterpretation of the Pharisees has received considerable impetus from current Jewish-Christian dialogue (indeed, one wonders at times whether the ecumenical spirit has not tended to distort history in its own way). At any rate, nonconservative scholars frequently suggest—and at times

explicitly state that the Gospel material is untrustworthy. One interesting approach is simply to ignore that material. A recent and very significant work, for example, introduces the subject of the Pharisees by pointing out that our main sources (the Gospels, Josephus, the Mishnah) are biased; the author then manages to reconstruct first-century Pharisaism without one reference to the negative portrait in the Gospels?

In support of a positive view of the Pharisees, one can appeal to Josephus, who makes several references to them in his writings. In one passage he states that the Pharisees are

extremely influential among the townsfolk; and all prayers and sacred rites of divine worship are performed according to their exposition. This is the great tribute that the inhabitants of the cities, by practising the highest ideal both in their way of living and in their discourse, have paid to the excellence of the Pharisees.¹⁰

Even after we make allowance for Josephus' prejudices, his testimony appears to conflict with that of the Gospels. Is it really likely that large groups of religious people would have admired the Pharisees if they had been avaricious and dissolute? Even more significant than Josephus are the documents of rabbinic Judaism, such as the Mishnah, the Talmud, and Midrashim-writings that are generally thought to reflect the views of Pharisaic Judaism (but see below). While these works contain features that suggest the need for some of Jesus' criticisms, one is hard pressed to find evidence of greed, hypocrisy, lack of concern for the "spirit" of the law, or an emphasis on ritual acts at the expense of moral acts.

B. THE SOLUTION

In the light of this apparently conflicting evidence, how does one proceed to reconstruct first-century Pharisaism? The conservative Christian is jealous to guard the infallibility of our Lord's teaching, much of which He expressed by contrasting it to the views of the Pharisees. If His assessment of the rabbis was off the mark, the validity of His message becomes suspect at a fundamental level." On the other hand, for those who do not accept the infallibility of Jesus' teaching as recorded in the Gospels, an interest in historical objectivity-defined in such a way as to preclude divine revelation—takes priority. Given these opposing starting points, it is almost inevitable that divergent reconstructions of Pharisaism will result; yet one can argue that a considerable measure of agreement on this question is possible if the following points are taken into account.

1. The Gospels confirm Josephus' testimony that the common people generally held the Pharisees in high regard as religious and moral leaders. As pointed out earlier, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican has a shock value-it *assumes* that Pharisees are viewed

as paragons of virtue. In fact, the very nature of Jesus' controversy with them makes sense only if Josephus' description is basically correct. This point is granted by conservatives and nonconservatives alike. What some conservatives have failed to appreciate, however, is that the people's high regard for the Pharisees as *moral examples* is inexplicable if the Pharisees as a group were "the slaves of lust, and avarice, and pride," if they "made a prey of the friendless" and could be characterized as "dissolute." In other words, it is clear that one important element in some conservative reconstructions clashes with the very testimony of the Gospels and, therefore, must be jettisoned.

2. Not all Pharisees were alike. The Mishnah itself speaks of the "wounds" (or "plagues") of the Pharisees (*Sota*, 3.4). The commentary on this passage in the Babylonian Talmud contains the famous description of seven types of Pharisees, including those who were actuated by impure motives, those who practiced their religion ostentatiously, etc.¹² The biblical material itself suggests that Jesus' more severe criticisms, particularly those that addressed *moral weaknesses* (e.g., Mk 12:40; Lk 16:14), applied restrictively to some, not all, Pharisees; consider, for example, Jesus' commendation of a wise scribe (Mk 12:34), John's portrayal of Nicodemus (Jn 7:50–51), and the presence of Christian Pharisees in the church (Ac 15:5).

The methodological significance of this point is that *informal generalizations* in the Bible (or elsewhere) *should not be confused with a historian's endeavor to generalize in a more or less scientific fashion*. In daily conversations and informal speeches, we accept without offense broad generalizations that we know cannot be substantiated. ("Car mechanics are thieves" in this type of context means, "The last two times I had my car worked on I paid more money than seems fair.") Thus, when Jesus says that the Pharisees "love the place of honor at banquets," we may understand that criticism as an informal generalization: those who are listening and who know that Jesus cannot be describing all (perhaps not even most) Pharisees understand the contextual restrictiveness of the statement and appreciate its force-self-importance was a temptation to which Pharisees, because of their position, were particularly susceptible.

3. Closely related to the previous point is the legitimate role that hyperbole can play in Scripture. According to Matthew 23:5, Jesus said: "Everything they do is done for men to see." This is more than generalization-it is an "absolutization," but clearly it is not meant in an absolute sense. In verse 3 Jesus had told the crowds to "do everything they tell you," but I know of no one who would take that statement literally.

4. Another consideration of a semantic nature is the use of the word "hypocrite," which in English has an unusually strong pejorative sense. The Greek *hypokritēs*, like its English cognate, indicates inconsistency between what one says and what one does, but it

would be difficult to prove that the Greek word carries the offensive overtones (such as dishonorable motives) that we normally associate with the English word. Paul describes the behavior of Peter and other Jews in Antioch as *hypokrisis*, but it is unlikely that he was thereby impugning their motives.

5. As noted earlier in connection with Acts 12, a statement made with a polemical purpose cannot be treated as one would treat an “objective” encyclopedia article. Jesus’ woes in Matthew 23 were not intended to address the questions that twentieth-century historians might ask concerning Pharisaism. The Pharisaic features Jesus chose to point out and the tone of the descriptions were intended to serve a particular purpose; therefore, when this material, infallible as it is, is used for quite a different purpose, one must guard against possible distortion.

6. What is true of Jesus’ statements in their historical setting is also true of the Gospel narrative in its literary setting. We must not ignore the fact that the extensive discourse of Matthew 23 is distinctive to Matthew and that it fits the polemic so characteristic of this Gospel. Without suggesting that the Evangelist has misrepresented Jesus’ teaching, we may readily agree that Matthew’s particular slant has affected his presentation: perhaps this chapter reflects some of the author’s own struggles with Judaism at the time of composition.

7. We move to a different set of questions when we consider the proper use of the rabbinic literature. The earliest of these writings (the Mishnah) was not published until well over a century after the Gospels were composed. To be sure, the document embodies a corpus of oral traditions that had been passed on for generations, but the dating of these traditions is fraught with difficulties, and some scholars, notably Jacob Neusner, are very skeptical about how much we can know about pre-A.D. 70 Pharisaism.¹³ Against any extreme skepticism, one can argue plausibly that the *main features* of Jewish religious attitudes and the *basic outlines* of rabbinic thought as represented in the Mishnah accurately reflect Palestinian Judaism at the time of Jesus (even if we are uncertain about the dating of specific customs and laws). Nonetheless, it cannot be doubted that the destruction of the temple played a fundamental role in the development of Jewish tradition; the resulting discontinuity between pre-70 and post-70 Judaism may account for some of the discrepancies between the Gospels and rabbinic literature.

8. But even if we grant a significant measure of continuity between first-century Judaism and the Mishnah, we still face a problem of interpretation. Most scholars operate within a framework that identifies the Pharisees depicted in the Gospels as the precursors of rabbinic Judaism. This seems to me a defensible interpretation of the evidence, but not all specialists agree. In particular, one should

acknowledge the work of Phillip Sigal, who views the Pharisees as “a complex of pietists and separatists who made up a segment of Judaism and included such known entities as Essenes and Qumranites as well as other unknown groups that proliferated at the time.”¹⁴ According to Sigal, the Pharisees constituted only one element in the formation of rabbinic Judaism, whereas the true “proto-rabbis”—a somewhat insignificant force in the first part of the first century—were not among Jesus’ antagonists. If one accepts this reconstruction, then our problems are solved with one stroke. I do not believe that Sigal’s views will be generally accepted (the similarities between the Pharisees of the Gospels and the later rabbis are too significant, as we shall see below), but he has brought together considerable evidence to prove that a simple identification of the Pharisees with the rabbis is quite unacceptable. In other words, we have good reason to believe that *some* of the objectionable features of the Pharisees were never characteristic of Jewish religious leadership in general and that therefore these features are not prominent in the rabbinic literature.

9. The evidence from Josephus too has come under scrutiny. Some scholars have noted that his presentation (particularly in *Antiquities*) differs in some important respects from what both the Gospels and the rabbinic literature preserve. While the differences do not affect directly our primary concerns, it is important to point out that even Josephus, though he writes at much greater length than the Evangelists, cannot avoid a very selective, and therefore incomplete, depiction of the Pharisees.¹⁵

We have thus far noted that our three primary sources—the Gospels (1–6), the rabbinic literature (7–8), and Josephus (9)—give us very limited information and are therefore somewhat inadequate for *the purpose of historical reconstruction*. But now we must address a more significant set of questions, namely, the precise nature of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.

10. Is it accurate to say that Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their *legalism*? The answer to this question would be easy if all parties involved were to agree on the meaning of *legalism* and its derivatives.

a. Most commonly, the term is used as a “slur word” to describe and condemn anyone who happens to take a stricter view of conduct than that taken by the speaker. We may ignore this particular use, but as we shall presently see, we make a serious error when we consider the Pharisees as “too strict.”

b. Closely related is the use of *legalist* to refer to people who appear to us to be “picky,” overly concerned with relatively trivial matters, particularly when such an attitude is accompanied by lack of concern for significant issues. One can argue, on the basis of Matthew 23:23–24, that at least some of the Pharisees could be characterized this way, but this type of criticism is not prominent in Jesus’ teaching and does not by itself disclose the heart of the issue.

c. A third meaning is that which focuses more formally on questions of *law*. That the Jews were preoccupied with legal issues goes without saying: the massive amount of material brought together in the Talmud consists primarily of attempts to interpret, apply, and expand those Old Testament laws intended to regulate the life of God's people. Some Christians who seem too ready to scoff at the many involved legal discussions of the Talmud forget that our modern legal system is incomparably more detailed. (Tax regulations alone could easily challenge the whole of Jewish *halakah* for complexity!) To be sure, one may point out that our legal system is not intended to legislate our religious behavior; no doubt the rabbis were often in danger of equating the divine will with their precise definitions and distinctions. All the same, it would be a grievous mistake not to appreciate the positive qualities that motivated rabbinic debates. The rabbis

believed that their task was to realize in everyday life the precepts of the revealed Torah. "To do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God"—to the rabbis these were not abstractions. They had to be effected in the world, and nothing is so difficult in secular affairs as to find exactly what is justice or mercy here and now—and what is to be done that is just and merciful. Since the Torah contained rules on many subjects, and since these rules had to be interpreted to apply to wholly new matters and to issues important only long after Sinai, we should not be surprised to find the sages concentrating on the minutiae of daily life.¹⁶

It is not farfetched to suggest an analogy between the rabbinic debates and the current controversy among Evangelicals about the ordination of women. We fool ourselves if we think that this sensitive issue is not a *legal* question. Who may or may not rule (*proistēmi*, 1Ti 5:17) is a matter of church order, regulation, law. Dozens of books (to say nothing of specialized articles) have appeared, many of them dealing with textual "minutiae" (the precise nuance of words, the force of Greek tenses, etc.). In short, the mere presence of extensive legal discussion among the rabbis does not help us to identify the nature of Jesus' criticism.

d. An explicitly theological sense for the term *legalism* brings us closer to the real issue. Serious writers who accuse the Pharisees of being legalistic have in mind a Jewish system of salvation that depends on human merit rather than divine grace. Unfortunately, several weaknesses can be detected in most characterizations. The first problem is a tendency to depict Jewish thought as monolithic. The rabbis themselves never attempted to formulate a coherent soteriology; and those who seek to infer a soteriology from the scattered comments in rabbinic writings face some serious pitfalls.¹⁷ The second problem arises from the first: having assumed a monolithic Jewish theology, scholars find it easy to play down or

altogether ignore rabbinic emphases on such topics as repentance and the need to depend on God's mercy.¹⁸ Finally, rabbinic soteriology tends to be caricatured as teaching a crass "medieval" doctrine that sees God balancing our good and bad deeds, our only hope being that the good outweighs the bad. Of course, such a description is not even fair to medieval theologians, and one can produce evidence that it distorts Jewish teaching on salvation.¹⁹

When all of this is admitted, however, one must still acknowledge that human merit plays a very prominent role in broad segments of the rabbinic literature.²⁰ Of special significance is the opinion (to my knowledge not explicitly contradicted in the rabbinic writings) that certain human acts can expiate sin. Even in such a pre-rabbinic document as Ecclesiasticus (3:3,14,30), sins are said to be atoned by honoring one's parents and by practicing almsgiving. The rabbis viewed acts of loving-kindness, the penalty of lashes, and, in some cases, death as having the power to atone for sins.²¹ It seems impossible to deny that, according to Jewish thought, good deeds should be viewed in some important sense as meritorious; to *the extent* that human beings may be regarded as contributing to their salvation, the biblical doctrine of grace is compromised in Jewish theology. But even these considerations do not pinpoint clearly enough the source of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, and so we move on to our final concern.

e. Legalism, theologically understood, can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Whether or not the Pharisees explicitly taught a merit system such as was described in the previous paragraph, we must recognize that Jesus is never represented in the Gospels as criticizing them for believing that they could atone for their own sins. He does indeed condemn them for their legalism—but a legalism that finds expression in a somewhat different form, namely, *through the relaxation of God's standards*.

This point can be illustrated most clearly by referring to a well-known legal ruling, the *prozbul*, attributed to Hillel the Elder, who apparently lived during the reign of Herod the Great. This ruling in effect did away with the command that debts were to be cancelled every seven years (Dt 15:1–3). That command was accompanied by a solemn warning: "Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: 'The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near,' so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin" (v 9). During Hillel's time, however, the wealthy were in fact refusing to lend money, fearing they would lose it in the sabbatical year. Since the poor were the ones suffering, Hillel (if we may trust the rabbinic attribution) used the legal fiction that debts cease to be private when transferred to a court, and he ordained that in such cases the debts may be collected.²² For humanitarian reasons,

therefore, Hillel devised a way of “breaking” the Torah; the explanation, of course, would have been that such “innovations and amendments ... fulfilled the basic reason of the commandment, whereas its literal observance nullified its original intent.”²³

This enactment-and other examples could be used-show that we miss the point when we view the Pharisees as being concerned with the letter rather than the spirit of the law. While that may well have been the case in some instances, it does not address the basic motivation for the rabbinic interpretation of the Torah. If we wish to identify an overly strict Jewish group, we should mm to the Qumran community; for example, while Jesus assumes that His hearers would certainly rescue an animal if it should fall into a pit on the Sabbath, the Qumranites explicitly prohibited such an act.²⁴ In a very important sense, the Pharisees made the Torah easier to obey. As a result of the *prozbul*, wealthy Jews no longer needed to be concerned about the solemn warning of Deuteronomy 15:9. The divine standard had been relaxed. The Torah had been accommodated to meet the weaknesses of the people. Alexander Guttman sees this feature as the genius of the Pharisees’ approach.

Emerging from the ranks of the people, the rabbis spoke in terms intelligible to the populace and were therefore able to lead the people in accordance with their teachings, a feat the Prophets had been unable to accomplish. Uncompromising idealists, the Prophets demanded perfection and the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth in their own time; therefore, they were doomed to failure. Prophetic Judaism never became a reality but remained only an ideal, a goal, like Plato’s *Republic*. The rabbis were idealists, too, but they were at the same time pedagogues. In guiding their people, they took the realities of life (among them the weakness of human beings) into consideration. They upheld the Torah as the divine code, but at the same time they recognized the need for harmonizing the Torah with the ever-changing realities of life.²⁵

It turns out, then, that Jesus, who like the Old Testament prophets demanded perfection (Mt 5:48), would have been critical of the Pharisees, not because they obeyed the Torah too strictly, but because they interpreted it too loosely.²⁶ This is clearly and precisely the point of Mark 7:1–13, generally recognized as a key passage for understanding the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. The controversy described in this passage centers on the law that ceremonial washing was required before eating. In fact, this is not an Old Testament law; it is not part of the *Written* Torah. But it was part of the *Oral* Torah, that is, the traditions of the elders. Scholars are generally agreed that the concept of the Twofold Law was the most distinctive feature of Pharisaic and later rabbinic Judaism. The Oral Law was viewed as on a par with the Written Law-indeed, in some respects, as more important, for a ruling that is part of the Oral Law may in effect set aside the Written Law, as in the case of the *prozbul*.

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees in Mark 7 is that they “have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men” (v 8). And, after describing a particularly insidious example, He concludes: “Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down” (v 13). This undermining of God’s Word, moreover, resulted in a muted consciousness of sin, for normally there were ways of interpreting the divine commands that mitigated their force. This frame of mind is almost surely the background for Matthew 5, where Jesus is said to demand of His disciples a righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees (v 20). Then, to preclude any interpretive moves that might render the law innocuous, He goes on to *intensify* specific scriptural commands. Just in case anyone might have missed the point, He concludes, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v 48), the equivalent of Leviticus 11:45, “... therefore be holy, because I am holy.”

The Pharisees were often in danger of thinking that they had adequately fulfilled their duty before God (cf. Lk 18:9–12,21), and therefore no great sense of dependence on God’s grace was likely to arise. In contrast, Jesus emphasized that the true servants of God are those who are ever conscious of their unworthiness (Lk 17:7–10) and who have learned to pray, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Lk 18:13).

The reader may wonder whether we have not moved too far from the subject of historical reconstruction in pursuing these questions. The excursion was essential, however, if we were to appreciate the complexities that a modern historian must face when reconstructing the past. Conservative Christians who forget that the Bible is not a history textbook will jump too quickly from the biblical data to create a picture of Pharisaic Judaism that is consistent with their presuppositions. Nonconservatives too, however, sometimes appear to ignore the character of New Testament narrative and tend to assume that the material is unreliable simply because it is incomplete and theologically slanted. The result is two opposing historical reconstructions. In the one, the positive qualities of the Pharisees are virtually ignored; in the other, Jesus’ condemnation is not taken seriously. In both of them, the precise point of Jesus’ criticism may be missed altogether.

III. RECONSTRUCTING FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

To bring up, as I have just done, the role of presuppositions in historical work raises some other questions. In attempting to deal with these, it will be useful to address another controversial topic, namely, the New Testament picture of the conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christianity. In this case, it will not be necessary to explore the various facets of the debate in great detail. My interest is

not to provide a new reconstruction but only to identify as clearly as possible what leads scholars to interpret the evidence in different and even contradictory ways.

A. F. C. BAUR

In 1831, the controversial scholar Ferdinand Christian Baur published a lengthy article that was to revolutionize the study of New Testament history.²⁷ Prior to the appearance of that essay, it had been generally assumed that the apostles and other leaders of the early church worked together in full harmony. True, the Book of Acts preserves evidence of occasional friction (e.g., 11:1–18; 15:1–21, 36–40; 21:20–26), and Paul recounts a sharp dispute he had with Peter (Gal 2:11–21), but these were viewed as minor exceptions that proved the rule. The data in the Corinthian letters, however, persuaded Baur that a fundamental conflict existed between Paul and the other apostles, especially Peter, who represented Jewish Christianity. Further research led him to more radical ideas, such as his conclusion that most of the letters ascribed to Paul were inauthentic. Finally, he published in 1845 a magisterial synthesis of Paul's life and ministry that presented in coherent form the "Tübingen School" interpretation of early Christianity.²⁸

In the introduction to this work, Baur emphasizes that, while we have two accounts of early Christianity (Paul and the Book of Acts), these two sources differ so much from each other that

historical truth must be entirely on one side or entirely on the other. To which it does belong can only be decided by applying the undisputed historical canon that the statement which has the greatest claim to historical truth is that which appears most unprejudiced and nowhere betrays a desire to subordinate its historical material to any special subjective aim.²⁹

Now one could readily argue that the Pauline letters, especially Galatians, being intensely polemical, are not to be trusted that Paul, concerned to prove his authority, inevitably distorts the material. In fact, this approach does not at all occur to Baur, who instead focuses on the apologetic aim of Acts: "its chief tendency is to represent the difference between Peter and Paul as unessential and trifling." The resulting picture of Paul is that of someone sympathetic to the Judaizing party, but this is so clearly contrary to the thrust of Paul's writing that the historical character of Acts "can only be maintained at the cost of the moral character of the Apostle." Without denying the importance of Acts as a source of apostolic history, Baur claims that the author is a second-century writer willing "to sacrifice historical truth" as a means of harmonizing genuine Paulinism with its Judeo-Christian opposition.³⁰

B. PRESUPPOSITIONS

We need not pursue the details of Baur's reconstruction, which in several respects set the agenda for subsequent New Testament scholarship.³¹ What concerns us here is identifying the principles and processes that led Baur, a brilliant scholar, to interpret the data as he did. Why does a J. B. Lightfoot, after analyzing the same biblical data, come up with a reconstruction that is often taken as the definitive refutation of the Tübingen School? And why does a Johannes Munck go even further than Lightfoot in minimizing the significance of the Judaizing opposition to Paul? Why do a large number of scholars reject Baur's thesis of a monolithic party opposed to Paul, whereas Walther Schmiedel sees in the New Testament text new evidence for such a uniform opposition-only not Jewish but Gnostic?³²

The simple answer is: presuppositions. Unfortunately, this is too simple an answer, for not everyone means the same by that word. When applied to Baur, the term *presuppositions* usually refers to his adoption of a Hegelian schema whereby Jewish Christianity was viewed as the thesis, Pauline Christianity as the antithesis, and second-century Catholicism as the synthesis.³³ It is doubtful, however, whether Baur's reconstruction would have been fundamentally different if Hegel had never existed. The evidence indicates that prior to his acquaintance with Hegel's dialectic, Baur had already identified the Pauline/Petrine conflict as the key issue of apostolic history.³⁴ While we need not play down the significance of Hegel's influence on Baur's philosophy of history, this particular "presupposition" does not account satisfactorily for Baur's handling of the biblical data.

Another approach is that of Horton Harris, who argues that Baur's radical interpretation of church history resulted from *broad* dogmatic presuppositions that precluded a transcendent personal God and miracles.³⁵ But there are several difficulties with this analysis. Other scholars starting out with that same set of presuppositions have developed widely divergent reconstructions of the apostolic age; conversely, as we shall soon see, biblical students who allow for the truth of supernatural events may also differ significantly among themselves in the interpretation of the data.

A second difficulty is that broad criticisms of this kind can easily encourage inexact descriptions of a scholar's view. It is quite unfair to Baur, for example, to say that he was "prejudiced in advance . . . against the historicity of Acts,"³⁶ for as late as 1829, when he had already given up supernaturalism, his handling of Stephen's speech betrays "not a trace of doubt about the historicity of the speeches of Acts or of the book as a whole."³⁷ Again, it is an exaggeration to say that "the fundamental axiom of Baur's whole historical investigation was that the New Testament writings are not trustworthy historical documents,"³⁸ for the phrase "fundamental axiom" suggests that

Baur did not attempt to set forth any reasons for his skeptical approach.³⁹ Moreover, even with respect to Acts he stated that it “remains a highly-important source of the history of the Apostolic Age.”⁴⁰

To complicate matters even more, Harris concludes his book in a way that suggests that Baur was unconscious of his presuppositions:

The problem which still confronts the investigation of the historical sources of Christianity is to set forth a total-view which takes full account of its dogmatic premises. For if we learn anything from the procedure of the Tübingen School it is this: that *Biblical exegesis and interpretation without conscious or unconscious dogmatic presuppositions is impossible*. The interpretation of the Bible and Biblical history demands an open, uncealed, and honest statement of the fundamental historical principles by which it is to be interpreted. The validity of all Biblical exegesis and interpretation rests upon its readiness to set forth clearly and unflinchingly the dogmatic presuppositions on which it is based?⁴¹

But did Baur, as this statement seems to imply, fail to be open and honest about his “fundamental historical principles”? Harris himself had earlier made clear that “Baur leaves us in no doubt” with regard to his “central presupposition.” His basic principle was that of a purely historical approach such as excludes the appeal to miracles as an explanation for what happened in the past.⁴² Now it is true that Baur seems to have persuaded himself that his approach, if successfully carried through, would insure complete objectivity, but he was quite ready “to set forth clearly and unflinchingly” his antiperennialist standpoint.⁴³ The irony, in fact, is that Harris himself falls, as all of us do, into the very pitfall that he warns us against. “And yet one has to read through the Clementine writings *with an open mind to see that Baur’s hypothesis is utterly untenable*. . . Whether anyone who was not *prejudiced in advance* would recognize Paul in this description is indeed doubtful.”⁴⁴

These strictures are not meant to undermine Harris’s main concern, which is not precisely the same as ours. One can hardly deny that a scholar’s fundamental assumptions about God will radically affect one’s handling of the biblical material. Unfortunately, there is seldom (never?) a one-to-one correspondence between those assumptions and the scholar’s historical reconstruction; therefore, to dismiss the reconstruction on the grounds that the basic world view is faulty does not solve our problem (particularly since faulty presuppositions sometimes open up legitimate options that another scholar may resist due to “correct” presuppositions; more on that matter below).

One other, more fruitful, approach to the role of presuppositions is to focus on the narrower network of mental associations that provides a meaningful interpretive framework for the scholar. In this

sense of the term, presuppositions need to be viewed not merely as valid but also as essential for understanding information. Learning does not take place by appropriating individual facts in isolation but by integrating them (consciously or not) into a prior coherent framework. Or to put it somewhat tritely: it is by a knowledge of the whole that we understand the parts. Baur was keenly aware of this fact and deliberately exploited it. For example, he knew well that many features of the Acts narrative did not clearly conform to the apologetic aim; but since such an aim (the whole) is so clear, “we need not give it up even though there should be some passages” (the parts) whose purpose seems to be historical. More specifically, with reference to the second part of Acts: “... although the narrative of the Apostle’s travels might seem to contain more personal and special details than the apologetic aim required, still it is clear that this very narrative is coloured throughout in accordance with that aim.”⁴⁵ It is plain that, for Baur, once the general thesis has been ascertained, any details that appear to contradict it are simply to be adjusted to it.⁴⁶

Particularly interesting is the preface to *Paul*, where Baur challenges his opponents to prove him wrong: “... let [my results] be denied and destroyed by the power of facts and arguments, if any one feels that he can do so!” Of course, he knows full well that at numerous points his interpretation of the data is subject to debate, and thus he must qualify himself:

There is no limit to controversy on points of detail. The abstract possibility of this and that detail can never be disproved: but this is not the way to dispose of a comprehensive historical theory. Such a theory appeals to its broad general truth, to which details are subordinate, and on which they depend: to the logical coherence of the whole, the preponderating inner probability and necessity of the case, as it impresses itself quietly upon the thoughtful mind; and against this the party interests of the day will sooner or later cease to assert themselves.⁴⁷

Baur is not thereby seeking to dodge the issue. The validity of a scientific theory is not necessarily disproven by the existence of contradictory data-what is needed is an alternate theory that has greater power to account for the facts.⁴⁸ Yet one can also argue-with a justifiable measure of frustration-that, according to Baur’s thoroughgoing application of this method, the facts seem to count for very little.

C. J. B. LIGHTFOOT

An interesting illustration of how facts-even a large number of them-may be easily ignored in the interests of a broad thesis is furnished by diverging reactions to Bishop Lightfoot’s response to the book *Supernatural Religion*. In his essays, Lightfoot sought to refute the claim that the Gospels are historically worthless. Stephen Neill

views Lightfoot's refutation as "tearing to shreds" the author of *Supernatural Religion* and unequivocally disproving its thesis.⁴⁹ But another scholar, Otto Pflieger, thinks that Lightfoot's answer was "extraordinarily weak." Pflieger regrets that "the short-sighted scholar found nothing better to do than to submit the author's examination of references in the Fathers to the Gospels to petty criticism; while, even if all the Bishop's deductions were correct, the general result of the author's inquiries would not be in any way altered."⁵⁰ It is clear that agreement on a vast array of details does not insure a common interpretation of the larger picture.

The reference to J. B. Lightfoot is useful in another way, however, since he is usually regarded as having put to rest Baur's reconstruction of early Christianity. Of singular importance for our purposes is Lightfoot's essay, "St Paul and the Three," an eighty-two-page monograph that ranks among the very finest works of modern biblical scholarship.⁵¹ In erudition, logical power, and lucidity, it remains a model of scholarly writing. Significantly, Lightfoot's answer to the Tübingen theories does not take the form of listing objections to them or answering Baur's arguments one by one. Rather, Lightfoot proceeds by presenting a positive reconstruction of his own. Indeed, anyone reading this essay who happened to miss a couple of footnotes would not be aware at all that it was written as a polemic against Baur and his colleagues. This matter needs emphasis because here Lightfoot certainly did not fall into the trap of debating the many points that Baur himself acknowledged were debatable (in other words, Pflieger's criticisms of Lightfoot's *Essays on 'Supernatural Religion'* do not apply in this case). On the contrary, Lightfoot set forth an alternate and coherent theory that, to apply Baur's words, "appeals to its broad general truth, to which details are subordinate, and on which they depend."⁵²

What is seldom pointed out, however, is how many important features Lightfoot's reconstruction shares with Baur's. In the preface to his commentary on Galatians, Lightfoot refers to the "extravagant" views of the Tübingen School, then adds: "But even in extreme cases mere denunciation may be unjust and is certainly unavailing. Moreover, for our own sakes we should try and discover the element of truth which underlies even the greatest exaggerations of able men, and correct our impressions thereby."⁵³ That Lightfoot is not merely paying lip service to the value of radical scholarship becomes clear from the commentary itself, where he shows remarkable sensitivity to the tensions between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles. His comments on 2:4 bear quoting:

What part was taken in the dispute by the Apostles of the Circumcision? This question, which forces itself upon us at this stage of St Paul's narrative, is not easily answered. On the whole it seems probable that they recommended St

Paul to yield the point, as a charitable concession to the prejudices of the Jewish converts: but convinced at length by his representations, that such a concession at such a time would be fatal, they withdrew their counsel and gave him their support. [This interpretation] best explains St Paul's language here. The sensible undercurrent of feeling, the broken grammar of the sentence, the obvious tenour of particular phrases, all convey the impression, that though the final victory was complete, it was not attained without a struggle, in which St Paul maintained at one time single-handed the cause of Gentile freedom.⁵⁴

And in the next paragraph he penned that memorable sentence (in a way the key to his interpretation of Galatians): "The counsels of the Apostles of the Circumcision are the hidden rock on which the grammar of the sentence is wrecked."

But this is not all. What characterized the apostle's ministry after the Jerusalem Council? Lightfoot's answer is in "St Paul and the Three":

Henceforth St Paul's career was one of life-long conflict with Judaizing antagonists. Setting aside the Epistles to the Thessalonians, which were written too early to be affected by this struggle, all his letters addressed to churches, with but one exception [Ephesians], refer more or less directly to such opposition. . . The systematic hatred of St Paul is an important fact, which we are too apt to overlook, but without which the whole history of the Apostolic ages will be misread and misunderstood.⁵⁵

Significantly, he ends the essay by disabusing us of the notion that the New Testament period was characterized by "an ideal excellence." On the contrary, "the theological differences and religious animosities of our own time . . . are far surpassed in magnitude by the distractions of" that age.⁵⁶

It is ironic that nonconservative, even radical, scholars in our day would probably view Lightfoot's reconstruction as simplistic—as a casualty from the days when the Tübingen theories affected every scholar's thinking. It is, of course, impossible to determine whether the basic outlines of Lightfoot's position would have developed even if he had never heard of Baur. In any case, he openly acknowledges, as we have seen, a measure of indebtedness to the Tübingen School, and one could plausibly argue that the extreme conclusions of a scholar with wrong presuppositions was what made possible significant progress in uncovering the history of the apostolic period.

Lightfoot, of course, opposed a fundamental feature of Baur's thesis: for Lightfoot, all the apostles were in substantial agreement regarding the message of the gospel. Closely related to this point, moreover, is his high regard for the reliability of Acts. Paradoxically, Lightfoot criticizes Baur for valuing Paul's letters too highly as a source for historical reconstruction! While it is doubtful whether Lightfoot himself would have put it in such terms, note how he approaches the problem:

St Paul himself is so clearly reflected in his own writings, that a distorted image of his life and doctrine would seem to be due only to defective vision. Yet our first impressions require to be corrected or rather supplemented by an after consideration. Seeing him chiefly as the champion of Gentile liberty, the constant antagonist of Jew and Judaizer, we are apt to forget that his character has another side also. By birth and education he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews; and the traditions and feelings of his race hold him in honourable captivity to the very last?

Lightfoot openly admits that the tone of the Acts narrative “differs somewhat from the tone of the epistles,” but the reason is that the latter were “written in the heat of the conflict, written to confute unscrupulous antagonists and to guard against dangerous errors.” In short, “St Paul’s language could not give a complete picture of his relations with the Apostles and the Church of the Circumcision.”⁵⁸

There is intense irony in the possibility that Baur was led astray because he treated the Pauline letters as a history textbook.⁵⁹ Though he was perfectly aware that they were written for quite a different purpose—to meet specific problems—Baur’s broader concern to preserve Paul’s personal integrity⁶⁰ kept him from perceiving the fragmented and slanted character of the historical picture provided by those letters. Here, then, is another crucial factor in Baur’s “preunderstanding” that materially affected his reconstruction. Indeed, we might be able to identify numerous other factors that provided Baur with a mental grid through which alone individual facts could be filtered and appropriated.

But if that is the way a historian works, we can begin to appreciate how difficult—nay, how hopeless and irrelevant—are the attempts to dismiss a theory on the grounds that its author had come up with it before examining the facts. As Barth once remarked, “Only God knows whether Baur found this historical line *a priori* or *a posteriori*.”⁶¹ Baur himself could not have told us. We are not very accurate judges of our own mental and psychological processes, and we do well to take with a grain of salt the frequent and no doubt sincere claims of authors who tell us they have approached their material with no preliminary hypothesis or even with a hypothesis quite different from the actual conclusions.

D. HISTORICAL OBJECTIVITY

What does all of this do to the goal of historical objectivity? Is it a complete illusion? Some writers have argued, sincerely, that knowledge of the past is quite beyond our reach.⁶² Practicing historians are seldom bothered by this philosophical problem; and specifically with regard to objectivity—an issue that cannot be ignored so easily—they tend to be fairly optimistic. Consider, for example, the high regard with which Herbert Butterfield is held as an objective historian. In the introduction to that author’s posthumous work, *The Origins of History*, Adam Watson commented:

Butterfield approached this vast and largely uncharted subject in a characteristic way, with no preconceptions, not knowing in what direction his researches would lead him. The trouble [with broad interpretations such as Spengler’s or Toynbee’s] was that in all of them the theory of interpretation or diagram came first. They were a *priori* intuitions. Sometimes, as he once said to me, it was a grandiose and imaginative one, but derived only very partially from the facts and owing more to other beliefs and other purposes in this world. Butterfield was concerned to start with the facts [followed by more detailed research and reflection]. He developed an extraordinary flair for this kind of open-minded deduction. [The] refusal to force the facts, [the willingness] to suspend judgment until they offered you their own answer, the ability not to prejudge anything, Butterfield called elasticity of mind.⁶³

One cannot avoid detecting a measure of naïveté in Butterfield’s judgment. Note, for instance, how he judges the credibility of the Gospels when they describe the disciples’ reaction to Jesus’ death:

The description of their shortcomings must have come from the confessions of the disciples themselves, for the authors of the Gospels *could hardly* have had any motive for inventing such things if they had not been known to be true, even though these pictures of human frailty do add realism to the narrative, and it might be argued that they served a purpose, bringing into greater relief the transformation that took place in the disciples immediately afterwards.⁶⁴

In this one sentence, Butterfield himself gives us two perfectly plausible motives for fabricating the accounts: to heighten the realism of the narratives and to exploit the apologetic value of the disciples’ later change. Yet these two reasons are relegated to a long clause that is grammatically subordinate to the main point, namely, that the accounts are authentic, since the Evangelists had no motive for inventing them!

Lapses and inconsistencies of this sort, however, do not give us sufficient reason to doubt all of Butterfield’s conclusions, or to reject his method, or to abandon his goal. The fact that controversial interpretations of history occupy most of our attention tends to obscure another, more significant fact, namely, the enormous amount of accessible historical data about which no one expresses any doubt. Moreover, there are vast areas of research in which scholars have provided reconstructions that remain unchallenged (save for details that do not substantially affect the larger picture). We may wish to question Butterfield’s criticism of historians that begin with a general theory; we dare not question his call to exercise restraint in making the facts fit the theory. We can argue that presuppositions play a much more positive role than Butterfield allows for; we cannot give up the struggle for objectivity in historical interpretation.⁶⁵

But is it really meaningful to use the term *objectivity* once we have conceded so much that seems incompatible with it? The

standard answer is that scholars should seek to attain as much objectivity “as is possible,” but this tells us nothing. The only kind of objectivity that we can sink our teeth into is that which is recognized as such by the community of scholars who evaluate historical interpretations. Asking a scholar to be objective is not a demand that he or she adopt a particular psychological attitude or an acceptable step-by-step mental process. It does mean that the scholar should seek to persuade other scholars who scrutinize any new interpretation according to agreed-upon canons of historical persuasiveness. Such a community process does not guarantee that any one historian will be objective, but it is a compelling force in determining whether a particular reconstruction approaches objectivity.

The much used-and abused—analogy with the judicial process in criminal cases helps us here. Although prospective jurors are rejected if they appear prejudiced, no juror can be expected to be free of the subjective element. Yet, we are all satisfied that, in the vast majority of cases, agreement among the jurors insures an acceptable measure of objectivity-enough, at least, that we are unwilling to replace this process with an “arbitrary” system. The rapid disintegration of the Tübingen School is, therefore, the clearest evidence that Baur’s handling of the facts can hardly be regarded as objective—quite irrespective of whether or not Baur had an *a priori* theory and whether or not he was aware of his fitting (forcing?) pieces into the large picture.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

It is now time to return to our initial question: Have misunderstandings created unnecessary conflicts between conservative and nonconservative historical reconstructions? The answer is certainly yes. But this issue must be distinguished from a very different question: Can we avoid widely divergent historical reconstructions? This second question requires a negative answer. Even authors who share a large number of significant premises will often interpret the data quite differently.⁶⁶ Besides, highly idiosyncratic theories-obnoxious and harmful as they sometimes may be—force us to face new questions that can open productive new avenues of research. At any rate, it would be an illusion to think that individual scholars could submit themselves to carefully defined reasoning steps or to arbitrary limits on their imagination.

On the other hand, it *is* possible to acknowledge the existence of misunderstandings and thus to avoid unnecessary polarization of viewpoints. To begin with, we all need to watch our language. As we have seen, nonconservatives tend all too easily to use terms such as “unreliable” when all they have shown is that the material so

described will not serve them to solve a problem that actually lies outside the scope of the biblical writer.

For their part, conservatives tend to read too much into some terms that are perceived, perhaps rightly, as objectionable. For example, Evangelicals understandably cringe when they hear a certain saying of Jesus described as “inauthentic.” Often such a description does indeed contradict biblical infallibility, but in some cases all that is meant is that the saying was not recorded in the Gospels in its original form. Evangelical scholars have always insisted that infallibility does not demand verbatim quotations: when a saying of Jesus occurs with different wording in two Gospels, it is quite possible that one of the Gospel writers may be giving an abbreviated or paraphrased form of the saying. In such a case, a scholar may ask which of the two is “authentic”—perhaps an unfortunate choice of terms but one that does not necessarily impugn the authority of Scripture if the scholar is merely concerned with establishing which Gospel has preserved the “primitive” form of the saying.

Similarly, unnecessary polarization has often resulted through the insensitive use of language in describing the diversity of theological expression that is found in the New Testament. The presence of such diversity does not at all undermine the divine unity of scriptural revelation. Conservatives, however, sometimes appear to impose an artificial uniformity on the New Testament (though Lightfoot taught us otherwise!), while nonconservatives very quickly identify diversity as contradiction. There will always be points of material disagreement in these areas as long as Evangelicals hold to an infallible Bible and non-Evangelicals do not; but some present conflicts do not belong in this class, and a genuine effort must be made to identify them.

In addition to the need for more careful use of language, another item that requires further reflection is the by now commonplace plea for scholars to show a sharper awareness of their presuppositions. The truth is (strange as it may appear to some) that most biblical scholars are not fools; they know full well there are limits to their objectivity, and their writings generally indicate some degree of self-consciousness as to what those limits are. We cannot give in to the temptation of simply dismissing what we don’t like on the grounds that “those liberals” (or “those conservatives”!) are slaves to their presuppositions. Still, there is something to be said for the view that scholars should make a greater effort to identify those premises that provide their framework for selecting, interpreting, and synthesizing the data.

Finally, an effort must be made to refine and make explicit those “agreed-upon canons of historical persuasiveness” that make it possible for the community of biblical scholars to weed out unacceptable theories. Considerable frustration will persist as long as the

scholarly orthodoxy appears to use a measure of arbitrariness in determining what is allowed as proper evidence.

The perennial focus of controversy, of course, is the Book of Acts. Lightfoot once stated that this book "in the multiplicity and variety of its details probably affords greater means of testing its general character for truth than any other ancient narrative in existence; and in my opinion it satisfies the tests fully."⁶⁷ At the turn of the century, the extensive research of William Ramsay provided further means of checking the book's veracity at numerous points.⁶⁸ Virtually everything that the book asserts, where it *can* be verified, checks out; yet most contemporary scholars maintain that the book is not to be trusted at those points where it *cannot* be falsified!⁶⁹ This would not be so bad if a serious attempt were made to refute the significant body of evidence that has been brought to bear. Routinely, however, the evidence is simply ignored. The standard critical commentary on Acts knows not Ramsay,⁷⁰ and the innocent reader of a recent and important synthesis can only deduce that all thinking persons regard Acts as a basically legendary work that happens to incorporate a handful of historical passages.⁷¹

Conservative scholarship can hardly be expected to take these judgments seriously-let alone agree with them-as long as they are evidently not based on a sober analysis of all the relevant data. To be sure, we can argue just as easily that conservative scholars have a good deal of homework to do in refining *their* criteria for what constitutes acceptable and persuasive evidence. The frequency with which Evangelicals use isolated bits of data *ad hoc* to support their positions has understandably alienated the scholarly establishment and provided an excuse for ignoring responsible work.

In either case, it should be marked, the impasse arises because of *the scholar's perception as to where the burden of proof lies*. An F. C. Baur is impressed with the differences between Acts and the Epistles; that leads him to place the *onus probandi* on the scholar who would argue for the reliability of Luke's description of Paul. A William Ramsay is stunned by the accuracy that characterizes Luke's habit of mind; therefore, he will not be budged unless someone shows him overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Perhaps it is possible for the scholarly community to define with some clarity the place and limits of the *onus probandi* in historical argumentation.

One must not think, however, that progress in these areas will resolve the basic conflict. By and large, modern critical scholars have persuaded themselves that the biblical view of the relation between faith and history must be totally reversed-the risk of faith, we are told, must not be avoided by appealing to objective historical reality.⁷² So long as historical veracity is viewed by one party as more or less irrelevant or secondary, genuine rapprochement is impossible. The Evangelical, convinced that any faith not based on historical truth is

illusory (e.g., 1Co 15:17; 2Pe 3:16), will continue to be scoffed at for failing to adopt a post-Kantian dichotomy between the religious and the scientific. This very commitment by Evangelicals, however, argues for a fearless approach to historical questions. An intelligent reliance on the authority of Scripture, coupled with sensitivity to its true character and purpose, yields the best prescription for responsible historical reconstruction.

Craig L. Blomberg

Craig L. Blomberg is Assistant Professor of Religion at Palm Beach Atlantic College, West Palm Beach, Florida. He is a graduate of Augustana College (B.A.), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (M.A.), and the University of Aberdeen (Ph.D.). He has contributed a number of articles to journals and has written “Midrash, Chiasmus, and the Outline of Luke’s Central Section” and “Tradition and Redaction in the Parables of the Gospel of Thomas” for the six-volume work *Gospel Perspectives*.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LEGITIMACY AND LIMITS OF HARMONIZATION

I. INTRODUCTION

The consensus of modern biblical scholarship disparages virtually all attempts to “harmonize” the scriptural data. The implausibility of the proposed harmonizations of certain conservative scholars only reinforces the criticism of the majority. Nevertheless, all historians, whether they employ the term or not, practice some kind of harmonization as they seek to reconstruct the truth of past events. The purpose of this chapter is to explore both the legitimacy and limitations of this method.

A major part of the debate stems from varying definitions of the word *harmonization*. Paul Achtemeier’s otherwise lucidly written work on the inspiration of Scripture nicely illustrates this problem. Achtemeier quotes James Packer as representative of the inerrantist position, a position that commits one “in advance to harmonize and integrate all that we find Scripture teaching, without remainder.” Then, after discussing examples of what he believes are errors in Scripture, Achtemeier returns to the problem of harmonization, which he rejects because of its artificial or connived nature. But here it becomes clear that he has equivocated on the meaning of the term, since the method he rejects is that of trying “to show that seemingly discrepant accounts can be reconciled by showing that they are only partial accounts of an actual event.”² As will become clear, however, this is but one of many methods by which apparent discrepancies between parallel historical narratives can be reconciled. To reject harmonization in this narrower sense in no way calls into question the viability or even the necessity of attempting, via *whatever* method, a harmonization in Packer’s broader sense of the term—that is, showing that no real discrepancy exists.³

The investigation of the legitimacy of harmonization in this broader sense lies outside of the scope of this study and is virtually identical with inquiry into the legitimacy of systematic theology *per se*⁴ or into unity and diversity of biblical theology.⁵ At this point it need only be noted that it is not merely evangelical scholars who have defended the propriety of this type of harmonization; even the most “radical” of biblical commentators recognize that certain apparently

conflicting data can be brought into agreement with each other. For example, among recent Synoptic studies, F. W. Beam's work on Matthew is one of the most skeptical of that Gospel's historical accuracy; yet Beare resorts to very traditional, harmonizing exegesis (in the broad sense of the term) when he explains that Matthew 7:1 does not preclude the judgments Scripture elsewhere enjoins upon Christians but merely stresses that such judgment "must not be harsh."⁶ Simple common sense dictates such exegesis; one cannot escape harmonizations of some kind. And, as will be discussed further below, this is a technique all historians utilize—even with somewhat errant documents.

On the other hand, if the interpretation is to be fair, certain tensions within documents representing similar religious or philosophical systems must be allowed to stand. One thinks of the way Scripture holds together seemingly disparate themes (e.g., predestination and free will, security and apostasy, the preservation and yet supersession of Old Testament law). The compatibility of the two members of each pair is not easily proved, but neither is their incompatibility; and the biblical writers' regular juxtaposing of contrasting themes suggests that *they* did not find the tension that severe.⁷

The key question for this study, therefore, remains that of the use and abuse of harmonization, narrowly defined.⁸ Yet even here, critique is not leveled only by those who would disassociate themselves from an Evangelical view of Scripture. Robert Gundry, writing as an avowed inerrantist, laments the fact that "conservative Protestants bend over backward for harmonizations," appealing to linguistic or literary solutions as well as the straightforward "additive" reconstructions noted by Achtemeier. Yet such harmonizations "often become so complicated that they are not only unbelievable, but also damaging to the clarity of Scripture."⁹ Gundry believes that redaction criticism is the preferable method, its application revealing that the Gospel of Matthew is a midrashic mixture of fact and fiction. Unfortunately, Gundry has employed the term "redaction criticism" in a much broader sense than is customary,¹⁰ with the result that several even more conservative scholars have overreacted (though not for this reason alone) by calling for Evangelicals to abandon redaction criticism altogether.

With all of this terminological confusion, a study of the proper and improper types of solutions to the apparent discrepancies of Scripture is absolutely crucial. Moisés Silva has graphically illustrated the problem, showing the varying amounts of liberties the Gospel writers seem to have taken with their sources,¹² and D. A. Carson has called for a balance between adopting "glib harmonizations" and refusing "easy" (i.e., obvious, common-sensical) ones.¹³ But no one has attempted to draw up a mad map to point the way out of this

methodological maze. Hopefully, this essay can begin to chart a few directions toward that end. In short, its thesis is that "additive" harmonization (what will be called the "narrower" sense) and redaction criticism are but two of several methods that can be legitimately employed to explain apparent discrepancies among documents of various historical genres. These methods will be discussed with somewhat detailed illustrations from the Synoptics and then applied more briefly to selected problems between parallel passages in Kings-Chronicles, Josephus, and ancient historians of Alexander the Great.

II. DEFINITIONS

At least eight main categories of types of resolutions of apparently conflicting historical data warrant attention here. Redaction criticism and harmonization, narrowly defined, are perhaps the two most controversial, so they will be treated last and in slightly more detail. Six other methods and the assumptions on which they are predicated, however, deserve brief treatment first.

A. TEXTUAL CRITICISM

In most study of ancient historical writing, the autographs of the relevant texts no longer exist. Conflicting testimony may, therefore, result from copyists' errors where the original manuscripts would not have disagreed with each other. The situation with Scripture is no different; most scholarly inerrantists (at least in Protestant circles) would emphasize that their doctrine of inerrancy applies only to the autographs?⁴

B. LINGUISTICS

Apparent contradictions may arise due to inadequate understanding of the meaning of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and even larger units of writing. When works of antiquity are under consideration, the "culture gap" makes this problem prevalent. Where the translation of foreign languages is involved, the potential for misunderstanding becomes even greater. The trend in recent biblical scholarship has been to emphasize the difference in meaning between words that could be synonyms, and this often makes parallel accounts of the same event seem more divergent than they really are.¹⁵

C. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Due to the limited information available, modern historians have problems using apparently contradictory testimony to reconstruct the facts of an event. In some cases, a formal contradiction exists

between statements that were both true in some limited context but that could not both be true if universalized, either temporally or geographically. In other instances, a writer may assume knowledge on the part of his audience-knowledge that would resolve an apparent contradiction but that he has not preserved for later readers' access.

D. FORM CRITICISM

Much more often than is true of modern writings, documents of antiquity were based on long periods of oral tradition before any written text appeared. If there is reason to assume such an oral stage behind a given text, the ways in which that tradition might have altered the text need to be taken into consideration when trying to explain conflicting accounts. On the other hand, it could be that originally parallel testimony agreed with itself, and later errors—and therefore contradictions—crept in during oral transmission. Evangelical scholars have rightly recognized that this type of assumption could not coexist with a belief in biblical inerrancy, but their rejection of these form-critical presuppositions is for the most part based not on this recognition but on valid observations about the differences between the formation of the historical writings of Scripture and that of other orally transmitted traditions of old.¹⁶ On the other hand, many stylistic variations between biblical parallels, especially in the Synoptics, most likely do arise due to form-critical processes, and the awareness of valid tendencies of transmission can help to explain otherwise perplexing differences among the Evangelists.

E. AUDIENCE CRITICISM

Based on J. A. Baird's pioneering work, this approach assumes, *contra* the prevailing fashions of biblical criticism, that the narrative settings and, more particularly, the audiences ascribed to the various Gospel pericopae are reliable.¹⁷ The paucity of such specific settings throughout the Gospels makes Baird's position highly probable; had the Evangelists felt free to invent settings at will, many more ought to appear than actually do. Some problems between apparent parallels may, therefore, best be resolved by acknowledging that the different settings given them show that they are probably not genuine parallels after all.¹⁸

F. SOURCE CRITICISM

Many ancient writings have a complex literary as well as preliterary history. In the case of the Synoptics, the two-document hypothesis remains the most probable, as the comprehensive studies of C. M. Tuckett and K. Uchida have demonstrated.¹⁹ A recent trend among certain conservatives to herald some form of Matthean priority as more amenable to a high view of Scripture seems misguided.²⁰ Commentators may just as consistently hold to Markan priority and

the Q hypothesis along with a high view of the editorial accuracy of Matthew and Luke.²¹ In general, however, the significance of source criticism is that it enables one to locate at what stratum of a book's composition potential problem passages appear, information which may turn what appears to be deliberate contradiction into an unwitting coincidence of noncomplementary but noncontradictory terminology. The epistolary example of James versus Paul on faith and works springs naturally to mind.²²

G. REDACTION CRITICISM

As noted, the biggest problem here is certainly one of definition. This chapter will use *redaction criticism* to refer merely to what many Christians have been doing ever since the Gospels were written—and to what all modern historians do to all sorts of ancient texts—namely, reflecting upon the distinctive themes, purposes, motives, and emphases of a given writer, especially in comparison with others who have written on the same topic(s). This method takes seriously the vast amount of material that any historian of any age could have chosen to include in his work and yet omitted; as a result, it asks why the author included what he did. Selectivity, however, scarcely implies errancy. The words of Lord Macaulay merit frequent repetition in the modern *Weltgeist*: "What is told in the fullest and most accurate annals bears an infinitely small proportion to what is suppressed," and "he who is deficient in the art of selection may, by sharing nothing but the truth, produce all the effect of the grossest falsehood."²³ Generalizations, summaries, and excisions must punctuate any chronicle in order for it to become intelligible history.

Evangelicals do well to reject the type of redaction criticism practiced by some extremely "radical" scholars, in which negative presuppositions about historicity are, by definition, part of the method.²⁴ But this is not always the case, even in so-called liberal circles. For example, W. G. Kümmel's standard textbook refers to redaction criticism merely as attending to "the literary, sociological, and theological presuppositions, methods, and tendencies of the individual evangelists."²⁵ Of course, Kümmel sees some of those tendencies involve distortion of part of the tradition beyond the bounds of historical accuracy, but nothing in his definition itself requires this.

Rather, redaction criticism can be neutral, in which various questions are raised to account for the editorial activity of the author. Where particular themes, distinctive vocabulary, and stylistic characteristics appear far more often in one writer than in another, especially when comparing closely paralleled material, it is reasonable to attribute the distinctives to conscious editorial preference. Such analysis is necessarily subjective, but proper statistical methods can identify with virtual certainty a limited number of features whose

frequency of occurrence precludes coincidence.²⁶ But the attribution of a word, sentence, or theme to a redactional origin in this sense proves nothing about its historical accuracy, which may only be determined by an application of valid criteria for authenticity and inauthenticity.²⁷ In fact, redaction criticism, as will be argued below, can become a powerful tool for defending the accuracy of Scripture rather than impugning it; for, without resorting to artificial and discrediting harmonizations, it can give reasonable explanations for why one writer altered a canonical source.

H. HARMONIZATION

In this narrower sense of one among many methods, harmonization refers to the explanation of apparent discrepancies between parallel accounts where it is assumed that both accounts are correct because similar events happened more than once or because each author has chosen to recount different parts of a fuller, original narrative. Not nearly as many of the classic problems in reconciling Scripture warrant a harmonizing explanation, in this limited sense, as those that have received one, and it is for this reason that the method is often rejected wholesale. Such, however, is standard practice among secular historians of both written and oral traditions,²⁸ and Gilbert Garraghan emphasizes that “almost any critical history that discusses the evidence for important statements will furnish examples of discrepant or contradictory accounts and the attempts which are made to reconcile them.”²⁹ Garraghan’s examples show as many instances of “additive” harmonization as of the other methods noted. Implausibility usually arises only when harmonistic hypotheses have to be multiplied, as for example in the coincidence of not only two but perhaps three or more people with the same name involved in similar circumstances.³⁰

Before turning to specific examples of each of these eight methods for resolving apparent contradictions, some objections to this entire enterprise need to be addressed. Although harmonization, both broadly and narrowly defined, is a standard practice among virtually all historians, many students of the Gospels would want to argue that the genre of the Synoptics is not a sufficiently historical one for the principles of modern historiography to be applied to them. Stewart Goetz and I have addressed that problem in our article on the burden of proof.³¹ Suffice it here to say that the two major works on this topic published since then, both dealing with Matthew, have not overturned the evidence cited therein. On the one hand, Gundry’s analysis of Matthew as midrash has generally failed to convince both “conservative” and “liberal” reviewers, while on the other, Philip Shuler’s identification of Matthew as encomium biography compares that Evangelist favorably with Polybius, Cicero, Plutarch, and Lucian, all of whom rank among the more respected historians of the ancient Greco-Roman world.³²

Of course, part of the problem in discussing “historical” genres is again the question of definition,³³ but if all one requires is that the document be a narrative of purportedly factual events where a strong likelihood is present of recovering a fair amount of accurate information about the past, then the Synoptics fit the bill handily.³⁴ The seemingly indestructible tendency to pit history against theology must just as consistently be exposed for the false dichotomy that it is, but the editorial concerns of each Evangelist do suggest that a redaction-critical explanation may account for the differences between the Gospels more often than a traditional harmonization. Moreover, as Werner Kelber stresses, when one uses harmonization not for historical reconstruction but to interpret one Gospel in the light of information in its parallels, the exegesis runs the inevitable risk of doing “violence to the integrity of both.”³⁵

III. SYNOPTIC EXAMPLES

It is probably impossible to specify in advance any detailed criteria for establishing when each of the eight methods enumerated above should come into play. For all but the simplest of examples, a combination of two or more methods may well work the best. Nevertheless, a few introductory suggestions for the use of each method appear below, with at least two examples from the Synoptics to illustrate each method. The literature on each of the passages selected for examples has been scrutinized in some detail, although this minimizes the number of passages that can be examined. But because so many superficial discussions of the phenomena of Scripture seldom seriously interact with the exegetical studies of competing perspectives, this seems to be a preferable method.

A. TEXTUAL-CRITICAL SOLUTIONS

The establishment of the original text of the New Testament remains far more certain in all but a handful of instances than for any other important text of antiquity; conjectural emendation is, therefore, virtually never appropriate. Caution must be exercised, however, against making the latest Nestle/UBS a new *Textus Receptus*,³⁶ and a specially relevant problem is that, due to the principle of *lectio difficilior*, harmonizing variants are almost never accepted as original.³⁷ The harder reading, though, can be too hard,³⁸ and in two instances it seems at least plausible to suggest that adopting a different reading than that chosen by Aland’s committee provides a good solution to apparent discrepancies.

1. Did Jesus promise that His heavenly Father would give good gifts or the Holy Spirit to His children (Mt 7:11/Lk 11:13)? The high degree of verbal parallelism between the rest of the two versions of

this pericope (cf. esp. Mt 7:7–8 and Lk 11:9–10) seems to preclude the recourse to assuming two different sayings from two different occasions in the life of Jesus, although this is not impossible.³⁹ The frequent conclusion that Luke prefers to add references to the Holy Spirit to his source material seems less certain since the study of C. S. Rodd.⁴⁰ Grundmann therefore suggests that the Lukan variant (*πνεῦμα ἀγαθόν*)—attested by p⁴⁵ L pc aur vg-is perhaps original.⁴¹ It is a *lectio difficilior* of sorts, since “good Spirit” is not a common biblical term, and it adequately accounts both for Matthew’s abbreviating *ἀγαθά* and for the later scribal change of Luke’s text to the more standard *πνεῦμα ἅγιον*.

2. To which side of the Sea of Galilee did the disciples head after the feeding of the five thousand (Mt 14:22/Mk 6:45)? Although at first glance the problem seems to be between Mark’s reference to Bethsaida (east bank) and Matthew’s reference to the “other side” (west bank; cf. Jn 6:17, which explicitly mentions Capernaum), the mention in Mark 6:53 of Gennesaret makes it clear that there is an internal tension in Mark’s own account as well. The critical consensus is that Mark is simply careless in his geographical references or uses them in service of theology rather than topography.⁴² But such specific place names are so rare in Mark that this seems improbable. The traditional conservative responses usually employ additive harmonization, either arguing for two Bethsaidas—one on each shore of the lake—or for two meanings of “the other side” so that Mark refers only to the other side of the small bay just outside of Bethsaida.⁴³ But there is no archaeological evidence for any Bethsaida west of the Galilean sea—John 12:21 must not be pressed⁴⁴—nor would Mark’s readers have any way of distinguishing this Bethsaida from the one referred to in Mark 8:22. The latter harmonization runs aground on the fact that *εἰς τὸ πέραν* is a stock phrase in the Gospels, referring to a trip across the entire sea (cf. Mk 4:35; 5:1,21; 8:13; 10:1).

Carson prefers a linguistic solution, noting that Matthew’s *ἕως οὗ* plus the subjunctive strictly implies “until,” whereas Mark’s *ἕως* plus the indicative means “while.” Thus, Jesus sent the disciples ahead to Bethsaida while He dismissed the crowds, and then they headed on across to the western shore.⁴⁵ The syntax, however, only sustains this interpretation with difficulty, since *πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν* reads more naturally as a definition of *εἰς τὸ πέραν*. The best solution, therefore, appears to be a textual-critical one, à la Lane, Cranfield, and Taylor.⁴⁶ “To the other side” is omitted by p⁴⁵ W λ q sy^s, and if this were a later, harmonizing variant, it would have made even more sense to omit “to Bethsaida.” Rather, it seems that the disciples did start out by boat for Bethsaida Julias but were blown off course and landed on the west bank instead. The very severity of a storm capable of carrying them this far from their destination makes the need for the subsequent miracle more intelligible. It also provides incidental corroboration

that the reference to the storm is an integral part of the setting of the story, not an interpolation into an original narrative that told only of Jesus walking on the water.

B. LINGUISTIC SOLUTIONS

The plausibility of an alternate translation to remove an apparent contradiction between texts increases in direct proportion to the unusual nature of the construction in the original language or to the coherence of the proposed, new translation. Some examples may be helpful at this point.

(1) Did Jesus preach his great sermon on the mount or on the plain (Mt 5:1/Lk 6:17)? The answer seems to hinge on Luke’s word *πεδινός* in both its diachronic and synchronic contexts. In Luke 6:12, Jesus is already in the mountains; and Matthew can scarcely have envisioned the large throng of people gathered on a steep incline. Some type of level place, or plateau, of which there were many in the Galilean hills, naturally suggests itself.⁴⁷ Isaiah 132 (LXX) clearly reflects this usage of *πεδινός*; and the other Septuagintal references, while often contrasting *πεδινός* with *ὄρος*, also regularly employ it as one of several geographical categories and as one of apparently higher elevation than the coast (Jos 9:1), the Negev (Jos 10:40), the low country (Shephelah; 2Ch 26:10), and the valley (Jer 31:8).⁴⁸ Gundry’s objection that all the diseased people (Mt 4:24/Lk 6:17–18) would scarcely have climbed into the hills to reach Jesus not only underestimates the length to which sick people will go to ‘find cures but also renders major portions of the Gospels unintelligible, since those who are ill confront Jesus at nearly every turn of the hilly, Galilean terrain that He traverses. However, to resort to believing that Jesus preached two different, programmatic sermons with remarkably similar introductions, conclusions, structure, details, and setting (apart from the mount/plain problem) leaves one unnecessarily vulnerable to hasty rejection by those who are already skeptical of harmonizing methods.⁴⁹

(2) Who was high priest when David ate the sacred showbread, Abiathar or Ahimelech (Mk 2:26/1Sa 21:1–6)? A textual-critical solution falters on the lack of any early manuscript supporting the omission of *ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθάρ*.⁵⁰ Most scholars simply acknowledge that Mark contains a historical error but give no plausible explanation of how this entered into what shows all signs of being at the very least an early Palestinian tradition from a Jewish-Christian community that knew well its Old Testament.”¹ William Hendriksen squeezes the texts entirely out of shape to suggest that both father and son gave the bread to David.⁵² The best solution again appears to be a linguistic one. John Wenham has called attention to the parallel construction in Mark 12:26 (*ἐπὶ τοῦ βάρτου*), in which *ἐπὶ* means “in the passage about.”⁵³ Abiathar is certainly the more dominant of the two high

priests in the larger context of the latter portion of 1 Samuel, making Wenham's application to Mark 226 extremely plausible. Moreover, in eighteen of the twenty-one Markan uses of the preposition, *ἐπί* has a local or spatial rather than a temporal sense, rendering the traditional translation ("when Abiathar was high priest") less likely.

There are certainly other problem passages in the Synoptics where a linguistic solution seems best. Included among these would be (3) Mark 14:66–72 and its parallels. Any scenario that envisions Peter denying Jesus more than three times entirely trivializes the force of Jesus' original prediction;⁵⁴ similarly, "the" maid of Mark 14:69 need not be resumptive, and the "man" of Luke 22:58 could be generic.⁵⁵ Also included are (4) the Old Testament fulfillment quotations, especially in Matthew 1–2; the semantic range of *πληρώω* in these formulae certainly exceeds the mere occurrence of what was straightforwardly predicted. Likewise, (5) "three days and three nights" (Mt 12:40) almost certainly does not equal seventy-two hours. Similarly, (6) the Gerasene/Gergesene/Gadarene demoniac(s) of Mark 5:1 and its parallels probably hailed from Khersa,⁵⁶ (7) the linguistic convention of citing only one source for a composite quotation explains the reference to Jeremiah in Matthew 27:9,⁵⁷ and (8) the problem of determining the day of the week on which Jesus was crucified is removed by recognizing that the "Passover" could refer both to the initial day of the feast as well as to its week-long celebration.⁵⁸

A specially significant type of linguistic analysis may account for several additional examples of the apparent license taken by the Synoptists in rewriting their sources. This subcategory perhaps ought to appear under redaction criticism or-if the changes be attributed to a traditional stage-as an example of form criticism. But the parallels with issues raised by the science of modern Bible translation justify its inclusion here. The procedure has been called dynamic equivalence,⁵⁹ contextualization,⁶⁰ or contemporization, but Joachim Jeremias's term *representational change*⁶¹ is the most descriptive.

In brief, the concept behind these terms is that the imagery and idioms that prove meaningful to one community or culture may need to be re-presented in quite different terms for a different audience in order to preserve their original meaning. Bible translations sometimes employ this procedure (most notably, with units of measure), and more paraphrastic compositions do so regularly (cf. the striking "flashlight" of Ps 119:105 or the "shake hands warmly" of Ro 16:16 in the *Living Bible*). Probable Synoptic examples of representational change include Luke's versions of the parables of the two builders and of the mustard seed (Lk 6:47–49/Mt 7:24–27; Lk 13:18–19/Mt 13:31–32). Thus, Luke turns Matthew's distinctively Palestinian wadi (a waterless ravine with steep sides that occasionally turned into a raging river after severe rains) into a broad river like the Omntes at

Syrian Antioch, where temporary summer shelters had to be abandoned before the winter rains set in.⁶² Similarly, Luke's mustard seed grows in a domestic garden rather than a rural field, again reflecting a concern for intelligibility in a more urban, Hellenistic context.

Even most conservative commentators seem relatively comfortable with applications of representational change like those discussed above. But is it not possible that such contemporization is in fact more widespread in the Gospels than they have generally recognized? For example, Grant Osborne suggested that the Trinitarian formula of the Great Commission (Mt 28:19) was a redactional expansion of an original monadic expression.⁶³ Yet the criticism he received for this view later led him to back away from his suggestion.⁶⁴ Of course, the standard critical assumption-that Jesus could not have spoken of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because Trinitarian theology developed only in a later stage of the history of Christianity-cannot be the motive for adopting a position like Osborne's initial one.⁶⁵

But what if the disciples had begun to realize that when Jesus spoke of His Father, He referred to a God with whom He and the Spirit were also uniquely one? Suppose also that Jesus only commissioned them to baptize in the name of the Father. Matthew could scarcely have recorded such words verbatim and expected an audience (whether Jew or Gentile) familiar with traditional Jewish monotheism to understand the new meaning that Jesus had invested in the word "Father." Some kind of clarifying expansion would be essential for the very purpose of *preserving* the meaning of Jesus' original utterance intact. Now this may well not be the best explanation of Matthew 28:19—and, in fact, I suspect rather strongly that it is not-but *in principle* the Evangelical should not dismiss it on the grounds that it contradicts a belief in inerrancy; quite the opposite, it suggests at least one way in which Matthew *could* have chosen accurately to communicate the original meaning of Jesus' terminology and to avoid the misconceptions that a new audience might derive from it. Blanket criticism of a view of *ipsissima vox* that allows for this type of representational freedom is entirely unwarranted.⁶⁶

C. HISTORICAL-CONTEXTUAL SOLUTIONS

The types of limitations imposed by historical context emerge most clearly in a discussion of "progressive revelation." Logical contradictions between Old and New Testament teaching do occur (consider all the so-called ceremonial laws that the New Testament no longer enjoins upon God's people) until one recognizes the New Testament belief that the Old Testament no longer applies as it did before the coming of Jesus. This altered historical perspective also accounts for seeming discrepancies *within* the Gospels (and Acts), since these books describe the events (from the Crucifixion through Pentecost) that brought about this change.

1. Thus, in Matthew 10:5–6 Jesus commands the disciples to go nowhere among the Gentiles but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, while in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) He sends them to all the *ἔθνη* of the earth. Despite elaborate attempts to explain this change of heart in terms of some division within the Matthean community,⁶⁷ the best explanation remains the traditional one—Jesus (like Paul) came first for the Jews, and after He and His disciples had preached almost exclusively to them, they turned their attention to the larger Gentile world surrounding them.

2. Similarly, the perplexing inconsistencies of Luke-Acts, with its portrait of the first Christians' somewhat schizophrenic attitudes toward the law, most likely reflect accurate historical reminiscence of a fledgling religion frequently uncertain as to how to identify itself over and against Judaism. As I have argued in detail elsewhere, Luke must not be pitted against other New Testament writers as a more conservative defender of the Law. Rather, a careful study of his redactional tendencies reveals that he strongly emphasizes the freedom and newness of the inaugurated kingdom.⁶⁸

A more subtle problem in historical-contextual analysis surfaces when authors assume knowledge on the part of their audiences that may no longer be recoverable. The historian (secular or religious) often has to postulate a resolution of conflicting data that may be far from demonstrable. At other times, supplementary historical information may grant a particular reconstruction greater probability.

3. For example, did Jesus allow for an exception to His mandate against divorce (Mt 19:9/Mk 10:11)? Carson's thorough resumé of the complex literature on this issue permits omission of detail here.⁶⁹ The traditional explanation of this formal contradiction remains the best. Mark's version assumes the reader's familiarity with the contemporary debate on divorce, in which all parties agreed that adultery offered legitimate grounds. Matthew merely makes this assumption explicit. The recent reply from Charles Ryrie and his students that this interpretation leaves Jesus' position no different from that of Shammai⁷⁰ misses the full force of the overall pericope (Mt 19:3–12/Mk 10:2–12), in which Jesus challenges even the strictest Pharisaic position ("for your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment"—i.e., Dt 24:1–4). Moreover, neither Evangelist gives any grounds for supporting Ryrie's alternate interpretation, in which Jesus, in the middle of the dialogue, changes the meaning of *ἀπολύω* from "divorce" to "annul."

4. The likelihood that gaps in historical knowledge provide the key to an alleged error in Scripture greatly increases when that "error" involves a conflict with extrabiblical data. The classic Synoptic example is the problem of dating the census under Quirinius.⁷¹ The linguistic explanation that says *αὕτη ἀπογραφή πρώτη ἐγένετο* should be translated "this was before the census" rather than "this

was the first census" substitutes a rather rare usage of *πρῶτος* for a moderately awkward one. The developments since Ramsay's proposal of an earlier administration of some kind by Quirinius, though, have only questioned certain details of his argument and have raised many new possibilities for a historical-contextual solution. John Thorley has surely not overstated his recent conclusion from a classicist's standpoint: "Until we can prove conclusively that Luke was wrong, perhaps we should at least allow that he may yet prove not to have misled Theophilus."⁷² More positively, E. Jerry Vardaman has discovered micrographic lettering on coins and inscriptions of the time of Christ that appear to substantiate a proconsulate for Quirinius in Syria and Cilicia from 11 B.C. until after Herod's death.⁷³

5. A similarly classic example, from the Book of Acts, is the alleged contradiction between Luke and Josephus on the chronology of Theudas and Judas (Ac 5:36; *Ant.* 20:97–98). I. H. Marshall cites this as the clearest example of the scriptural phenomena that make him uneasy with the term "inerrancy," especially since the rarity of the name "Theudas" weighs against arguing for two different men of the same name leading similar rebellions.⁷⁴ Yet the similarities between the accounts end there, as E. Yamauchi has emphasized,⁷⁵ and Theudas can be a contraction of Theodotus, Theodorus, or Theodosius.⁷⁶ That Luke and Josephus had two separate people in view remains the most probable explanation, even from the standpoint of a secular historian.⁷⁷ Who is to say that archaeologists will not yet unearth some documentation or inscription to corroborate Luke here as they have done for him consistently elsewhere?

D. FORM-CRITICAL SOLUTIONS

1. The Role of Oral Transmission

The exhaustive study by E. P. Sanders of the tendencies of oral transmission in early Christian tradition dealt a fatal blow to Bultmann's "law of increasing distinctness," and Leslie Keylock's subsequent work should have buried it.⁷⁸ Instead, a tendency towards abbreviation frequently appears, as I have discussed in some detail in connection with the *Gospel of Thomas*.⁷⁹ But many stylistic tendencies peculiar to the oral retelling of the various forms that Bultmann enumerated remain valid.⁸⁰ For example, the Lukan account of the parable of the wicked husbandmen streamlines and restructures the arrival of the various servants into a climactic threefold sequence (Lk 20:9–16a/Mk 12:1–9). So too the famous inversion of the killing and casting out of the son in the same parable (common to Luke and Matthew) probably reflects no theological allegorization of the crucifixion of Jesus outside the walls of Jerusalem but only a stylistic improvement to create climactic order. The most likely locus for both (1) and (2) is in oral tradition.⁸¹

Matthew's omission of the Capernaum centurion's Jewish embassy to mediate between him and Jesus to request healing for his slave probably also reflects form-critical processes at work. Ancient convention permitted referring to someone speaking or acting when it was a subordinate who actually carried out the command (cf. Mt 27:26 on Pilate scourging Jesus, 2Ki 21:10 with 2Ch 33:10 on God speaking to Manasseh by His prophets, and Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* 73:1 with Arrian's *Anabasis* 7:16.5 on Alexander "meeting" the Chaldean seers through Nearchus), and modern convention is not that different (e.g., saying that "the president announced ..." when in fact it was his press secretary who spoke with reporters). But form criticism supplies the motive for this type of shorthand. H. J. Held labels it the "law of scenic twofoldness." In other words, the oral transmission of a detailed narrative tends to simplify the story so that no more than two characters engage in conversation at any one time.⁸² No theological distinctive or correction of earlier tradition is intended.⁸³

2. The Stereotype Form of a Pericope

A second way that form criticism can help to explain differences between parallels (without implying a distortion of meaning) involves the stereotype form of a pericope. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19–31) provides a fairly noncontroversial example (at least for biblical, though not always for systematic, theologians!). Since a parable makes an extremely limited number of main points,⁸⁴ one need not worry if this picture of the afterlife differs from every other Scripture on the topic. Local color from Jewish and Egyptian folklore has dramatized the depiction of Hades and Abraham's bosom, but the exegete is not committed to view Jesus' appropriation of this imagery as doctrinal endorsement. Rather, Jesus' emphasis lies in verses 27–31, for which no parallel emerges in the extrabiblical literature. The rich man's sin lay not in his wealth *per se* but in his lack of repentance—to which the law directed him and for which even a resurrection would provide no compelling stimulus.

A more controversial example might be the saying about the coin in the fish's mouth (Mt 17:27). At first glance, most assume Matthew is here relating what he believed was a genuine miracle of Jesus. Yet even a superficial rereading reveals that no event is ever narrated; Jesus merely gives a cryptic command. This passage cannot be categorized along with the other miracle stories, because it is not a *story*. Matthew never tells us that Peter obeyed the command; and given his propensity for disbelief and misunderstanding, that obedience can scarcely be taken for granted. Even if Peter did go to the sea, we have no record of how he interpreted his Lord's words. Marcus Ward suggests that perhaps Jesus meant for Peter "to catch fish which can be sold to pay the tax for them both."⁸⁵ Alternately, G. M. Lee likens the saying to a picturesque and slightly humorous

injunction to "Go and catch a fish, and it will be useful for our purpose as one of those fabled fishes with a coin in their mouth."⁸⁶

Conservative commentators who do not believe that Jesus meant this command to be taken literally are troubled—not because they have an ant-supernatural bias but because this is a rather uncharacteristic, seemingly trivial, and unnecessarily spectacular action simply to pay a tax. Richard Bauckham diminishes this distinctiveness somewhat by suggesting that this is a gift-miracle like the feedings of the multitudes and an occasion when Jesus and the Twelve were quite destitute.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, nothing in the context corroborates this otherwise attractive suggestion, whereas the immediately preceding verses do disclose that Jesus has just been speaking in a parabolic mode. Tellingly, Bauckham admits that the primary unsolved question for his thesis is the form of verse 27. Recognizing this entirely distinct form and the juxtaposition of a short metaphor in verses 25–26 makes opting for an ironic or metaphorical rather than a literal interpretation of Jesus' words very attractive, even if we may not know for sure the precise import of that metaphor. To cite Lee again: "I yield to no one in the belief that miracles happen, but when a miracle seems more characteristic of D. D. Home than of Christ, I think we should ... ask whether a non-miraculous explanation is possible."⁸⁸ A rather elementary form-critical observation in this instance suggests that one is.

E. AUDIENCE-CRITICAL SOLUTIONS

If the Evangelists supply obviously distinct settings for what synopses nevertheless present as parallel passages, those pericopae deserve *a priori* consideration as different sayings or events from different times in Jesus' ministry. Two examples that I have discussed elsewhere are the Matthean and Lukan "versions" of the parables of the talents (pounds) (Mt 25:14–30/Lk 19:11–27) and of the lost sheep (Mt 18:12–14/Lk 15:3–7).⁸⁹

An apparent doublet within one Gospel offers another type of illustration. Many critics, for example, assume that Mark (or his tradition) invented the feeding of the 4,000 (Mk 8:1–10) on the basis of the feeding of the 5,000 (6:33–44).⁹⁰ Yet Mark implicitly contrasts a largely Jewish (the 5,000) audience with a largely Gentile (the 4,000) one, with the latter narrative grouped together with other stories of Jesus' travel outside of the land of Galilee (7:24–37; cf. also the distinctive words for "basket" in 6:43 and 8:8⁹¹). Moreover, Mark subsequently depicts Jesus referring back to both events as separate incidents (Mk 8:19–20). The only real stumbling block to agreeing with Mark's presentation is the apparent absurdity of the disciples not recalling the first feeding as they question Jesus before the second (8:4). Yet Knackstedt points out that the Matthean parallel (Mt 15:33) strongly emphasizes that the disciples' question could refer only to

their inability to deal with the problem *alone*.⁹² Carson concurs, considering that the new Gentile audience, Jesus' rebuke in John 6:26, and the "vast capacity for unbelief" inherent in humanity all ensure that the disciples' response is "not sufficient to pmve this pericope a doublet."⁹³

In fact, audience criticism regularly pmvides the antidote to hypotheses of apparent doublets. An important line must be drawn between the modification and the invention of Gospel material, whether at the traditional or at the redactional stage. As Goldingay emphasizes, even precritical historiography rarely employs wholesale creation *de novo*.⁹⁴

F. SOURCE-CRITICAL SOLUTIONS

The ascription of specific settings or audiences in the Gospels is rare enough that even when audience criticism cannot demonstrate that two apparently parallel pericopae in fact represent different events, this possibility must be entertained. In some instances, it may be source criticism that points in this direction.

1. Major portions of Luke's central section, for example, probably stem from sources peculiar to that Evangelist, and a selection of the parables scattered throughout these chapters, including all of those obviously unparalleled, form a chiasmic sequence suggesting some kind of pre-Lukan unity.⁹⁵ Included in this chiasmus, however, are the parables of the watchful servants (Lk 12:35–38) and of the great supper (Lk 14:16–24)—for which many have found parallels in Mark 13:34–37 and Matthew 22:1–10, respectively. Source criticism (including an analysis of vocabulary as well as structure⁹⁶) points in the opposite direction, and the problems inherent in assuming that such drastically different "parallels" developed from a common original disappear.

2. Did Jesus command His disciples to take a staff and sandals on their "missionary" journey or not (Mt 10:10/Mk 6:8–9/Lk 9:3)? The absolute antithesis here between Mark and Matthew/Luke has convinced even very conservative scholars of Scripture's errancy.⁹⁷ Inerrantists' replies vary. (a) Two different types of staffs and sandals are envisioned⁹⁸ -but there is no difference in the Greek diction to support this. (b) Matthew's *κρίζω* means "acquire" (i.e., extra items), while Mark's *αἶρω* refers to what they are already carrying/wearing⁹⁹—but Luke also uses *αἶρω*, and in any event this solution permits too much; Matthew would then be permitting the disciples to carry the money that Mark denies them. (c) All three Gospels agree on the basic concept of traveling light; only the details differ¹⁰⁰—but this solution must still admit the presence of a contradiction, even if it seems incidental.

The critical consensus, therefore, opts for a source-critical explanation for the differences, the commonest of which is that

Matthew conflated two different accounts of the commission—Mark's and Q's (reflected in Luke). This, however, only pushes the problem back a stage and does not remove the discrepancy. A historical-contextual solution, in which Mark is making an implicit assumption explicit, works for Luke's omission of any reference to sandals¹⁰¹ but not for Matthew's version nor for either Evangelist's prohibition of a staff. A source-critical solution does seem preferable-but with the somewhat distinct nuances offered by Osborne. Luke 10:1–12 describes Jesus' subsequent sending of the seventy (-two), which contains some closer parallels to Matthew 9:37–10:16 than does Luke 9:1–6. Matthew has consequently conflated Mark's account of the sending of the twelve with Luke's account of the seventy (whether from Q or from some other source), while Luke has assimilated some of his material from chapter 10 into his account in chapter 9.¹⁰² In other words, the prohibitions against staff and sandals originally stemmed only from the latter mission; in the former Jesus did permit these two items.

Is this reconstruction compatible with a doctrine of inerrancy? Indiscriminate conflation and assimilation certainly is not, but in this case Osborne's solution works, precisely because the twelve were most likely part of the seventy.¹⁰³ Luke's use of *ἑτέροισι* in 10:1 at first seems to contradict this claim; but on closer examination it contrasts with the three who reject discipleship in 9:57–62 and not with the twelve, who do not reappear until 10:17, 23, where they seem to overlap with the seventy. Neither Matthew nor Luke expected readers to compare his Gospel with Mark's; taken on its own, Matthew and Luke each presents entirely factual reports of what Jesus told His disciples before sending them out to minister in His name, even if they do not spell out the number and nature of these missions as clearly as modern readers might have wished.

G. REDACTION-CRITICAL SOLUTIONS

The abuse of redaction criticism by its more radical practitioners should not blind the more cautious critic to its immense value.¹⁰⁴ In many cases, it provides a more convincing explanation for the differences between the Gospels than does traditional harmonization, without jeopardizing the reliability of any of the canonical versions. The Evangelists' editorial activity includes both stylistic and theological re-presentation of tradition, and one of the reasons redaction criticism sometimes seems so suspect is that certain critics have too often appealed to the latter rather than to the former.

1. Stylistic Redaction

The following two examples present parallel passages where stylistic motivations probably best account for the seeming contradictions, despite the fashion of scholarship to favor more radical evaluations.

a. Did Jesus rebuke the disciples for their lack of faith before or after stilling the storm, and how harsh was He (Mt 8:26/Mk 4:39–40)? Ever since Bomkamm's pioneering redactional study, many have argued that Matthew here contradicts Mark by reversing the order of miracle and rebuke and by substituting "little faith" for "no faith" in order to stress the positive side of the disciples' belief in Jesus.¹⁰⁵ Yet it is hard to see how *ὀλιγόπιστοι* is any less harsh than *οὐπω ἔχετε πίστιν*; One could even argue the reverse, that Matthew's declarative label leaves no room for the possibility which Mark preserves for answering his interrogative with a partially positive reply! Matthew does emphasize discipleship (note his addition in 8:23b) but not so as to contradict Mark. As for the change in order, if either evangelist is intending a chronological sequence at this point, it would more likely be Matthew (*τότε* [Mt 8:26] vs *δέ* [Mk 4:39]). Mark is content to preserve his typically paratactic narrative without implying that Jesus did not speak to the disciples until after the miracle. Stylistic improvement and characteristic diction best account for Matthew's language, and no contradiction with the Markan narrative need be inferred.¹⁰⁶

b. Did Jesus cure blind Bartimaeus before or after entering Jericho (Mk 10:46/Lk 18:35)? Here a redactional analysis of Luke's style suggests a better approach than traditional harmonization. Many have argued that Jesus was leaving "old Jericho" and heading toward "new Jericho," since the rebuilt city had left the old ruins intact at a separate nearby site.¹⁰⁷ But what reader would ever suspect that Mark had this former, virtually uninhabited location in mind, especially when he describes Jesus as leaving with "a great multitude"? Hiebert adopts a linguistic solution in which Luke's *ἐγγίζειν* refers merely to being in the vicinity without the specific connotation of "drawing near."¹⁰⁸ This view would resolve the apparent contradiction, but it supplies no motive for Luke's alteration. A study of Luke's redactional tendencies, however, offers the missing motive. Luke (or the tradition he inherited) consistently abbreviated Mark, as word counts from parallel passages readily show.¹⁰⁹ For Luke's purposes, Mark is unnecessarily detailed (lit., "and they come to Jericho, and as he was leaving Jericho ..."); so Luke streamlines the narrative while substituting a sufficiently ambiguous verb so as not to contradict Mark (*ἐγγίζω* for *ἔρχομαι*). But why not avoid the potential confusion altogether by omitting mention of Jericho as well?¹¹⁰

The answer emerges from a study of Luke's geographical references. Despite the impression that Luke 9:51–18:34 is a travel narrative, fewer specific place names occur in these chapters than in any other section of similar length in the Gospels. A topical rather than a chronological outline best accounts for this material.¹¹ With the reference to Jericho in 18:35, the situation reverses itself dramatically. Luke locates each succeeding pericope in or near a specific city until Jesus and His entourage finally enter Jerusalem (18:35;

19:1,11,28–29). The proximity of all cities to Jerusalem (Jericho, Bethphage, and Bethany) reinforces the previously dormant emphasis of 9:51 and prepares the reader for the climactic arrival in the holy capital and the events that await Jesus there.

Assuming Mark 10:46 is accurate, the conversion of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1–10) must have occurred before the healing of the beggar, but Luke inverts their order to create a climax within three closely linked pericopae (18:35–43; 19:1–10; 19:11–27; and note the closure in 19:28a). All portray Jesus upending traditional Jewish expectation, but each successive scene *causes* severer shock waves—healing a blind and so presumably sinful man, fellowshiping with a tax collector, and destroying servants and enemies in a parable in which they clearly stand for the Jewish leaders. Nevertheless, Luke's inversion creates no chronological error, since 19:1 supplies no temporal link with the preceding paragraph.¹¹²

The examples of the differences between the parallel versions of the storm-stilling and Bartimaeus miracles have raised the question of topical versus chronological narrative in the Gospels. One of the most significant contributions of redaction criticism (some would distinguish this by calling it "composition criticism") is its emphasis on the structure of the Gospels and the original outline and literary design of each Evangelist. The dictum of modern biblical criticism that not one of the Gospels gives enough data for a detailed reconstruction of the chronology of Jesus' ministry merits acceptance—for no other reason than that the data themselves bear this out. A careful analysis shows that no two Gospels contradict each other's chronology—but only if no chronology is read into the juxtaposition of pericopae *except where undeniably temporal connectives appear*.¹¹³

Granted this principle, it is, therefore, methodologically inconsistent to infer chronology from mere narrative sequence, even where no potential conflicts with parallels arise. Moreover, all three Synop-tists regularly group pericopae by form or topic with few temporal connectives (e.g., the miracles of Mt S-S, the controversy stories of Mk 2:1–3:6, and Luke's central section), so that it is *a priori* likely that other sections of the Gospels less clearly demarcated in structure also follow a logical rather than chronological outline. Mark's Gospel, often felt to be the most chronological of the three, may in fact be the most topical.¹¹⁴ Luke's claim to have written in order (Lk 1:3) does not make his Gospel any different; *καθεξῆς* may refer just as easily to topical as to temporal sequence.¹¹⁵ An important implication of these findings is that a detailed harmony of the life of Christ is no longer recoverable, not because the Gospels contradict each other in chronology but because they provide too little chronological data. At best, any harmony must be judged merely "possible" and not "demonstrable," and exegesis should base few conclusions upon the hypothetical order of events proposed.¹⁶

2. Theological Redaction

The second main category of editorial activity is theologically motivated redaction. Certain cases are clear-cut and widely recognized even among conservatives.

a. For example, Luke reverses the order of the second and third temptations of Jesus and replaces the potentially temporal connective *τότε* with a simple *δέ* (Lk 4:9/Mt 4:5) in order for the ordeal to climax at the Jerusalem temple. Luke consistently emphasizes Jesus' relationship with that site; his entire two-volume work is probably best outlined geographically, with chiasmic parallelism centering attention on the resurrection appearances in and around Jerusalem.¹¹⁷ Other examples prove more controversial, as with the two that follow.

b. Did Jesus curse the fig tree before or after He cleansed the temple (Mt 21:18–22/Mk 11:12–14, 20–25)? Close attention to transitional vocabulary again demonstrates that no necessary contradiction exists. Mark has apparently preserved the more complex historical sequence, which Matthew telescopes and presents as an uninterrupted event. Translations of *πρωί* that include a definite article (e.g., “in the morning”) may mislead the reader of Matthew 21:18; Matthew himself gives no indication of the day to which he is referring. Similarly, there is no problem presupposing a gap between Matthew 21:19 and 20, since Matthew never reveals when the disciples saw the withered tree (“at once” only governs the withering, and Mark 11:14 suggests that the disciples only *heard* Jesus' original curse from a distance). The Synoptists omit much information that one could wish they had preserved, so that postulating gaps of this nature is scarcely special pleading. Rather, it fits exactly with the type of redaction that lies behind virtually every page of the Gospels.

Theologically, both Matthew's and Mark's presentations sandwich the cursing miracle and the temple ministry (Mt 21:12–17, 18–19, 20ff./Mk 11:12–14, 15–19, 20–25), thus interpreting the former in light of latter. Jesus' *Strafwunder* acts out the parable of the fig tree (Lk 13:6–9), pointing to God's coming judgment upon the faithless, Jewish leaders. Only this type of symbolic or metaphorical explanation of Jesus' actions can save them from seeming extremely capricious, and Matthew's and Mark's redactional linkage in fact clarifies Jesus' historical intentions. The juxtaposition of Jesus' sayings on faith (Mt 21:21–22/Mk 11:22–25) does not refute this interpretation, since the mountain to be cast into the sea probably stands for the temple on Mount Zion and its impending obsolescence.¹¹⁸ Redaction criticism and a presumption of historical authenticity actually complement one another in service of a coherent exegesis.

c. Did the rich young ruler ask Jesus about the good or did he call Him good (Mt 19:17/Mk 10:18)? An additive harmonization simply

affirms both, but the grammatical thread on which this hangs (the continuous force of *ἐπηρώτα* in Mk 10:17) is extremely slender.¹¹⁹ A typical redaction-critical explanation alleges that Matthew wanted to avoid the potential mistake that Mark's readers might have made if they inferred that Jesus denied either His divinity or His essential goodness.¹²⁰ If such an explanation derives from an invalid reconstruction of the development of primitive Christology, then it of course must be rejected. But it need prove no more problematic than, say, Luke's insertion into the parable of the wicked husbandmen of “perhaps” (*ἴσως*) before the vineyard owner's declaration that “they will respect” his son (Lk 20:13; cf. Mk 12:6), lest it appear that Jesus thought that God really believed the Jews would accept Him as their Messiah. Furthermore, the result of Matthew's modification of the rich young ruler's dialogue with Jesus in fact shifts the focus of attention from Christology to the Law, thereby making any emphasis on a heightened view of Jesus unlikely.¹²¹

Redaction criticism, then, supplies a motive for Matthew's change, but does his resultant narrative remain within the bounds of the *ipsissima vox Jesu*? Here a more traditional (but not “additive”) harmonization provides a method for replying affirmatively. If the man, as in Mark, originally asked “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Matthew would be entirely justified in interpreting the question as one about a good work (*ἀγαθόν*). Jesus could then very easily have replied in a way deliberately susceptible of a double meaning. Even in Greek, *τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν* can just conceivably be translated, “Why do you say to me ‘good’?”—which could then hark back to either Mark's or Matthew's use of the adjective.¹²² A harmonization that might seem at first like a desperate expedient and a redactional analysis reminiscent of an unwarranted skepticism in fact combine to lend credence to each other. Neither Evangelist has distorted Jesus' original meaning, and the motives of both become intelligible.

Similar marriages of these odd bedfellows undoubtedly occur much more often than commentators of any ideological commitment have suspected. At least two other probable examples include the chronology of the Transfiguration (six days or eight after the first passion prediction?—cf. Mk 9:2 and Lk 9:28) and the centurion's cry at the Crucifixion (Son of God or innocent man?—cf. Mk 15:39 and Lk 23:47). In the former instance, Luke's “about” (*ὥσει*) avoids a formal contradiction with Mark, but only a realization of the theological parallels between the Transfiguration and the ministry of Moses (which included a six-day preparation for revelation—Ex 24:16) makes any sense of the difference. In the latter instance, a nonadditive harmonization can supply an original saying of the centurion from which both Mark's and Luke's versions can be derived as faithful interpretations (e.g., “Certainly this man was justified in calling God

his Father.”).¹²³ Yet only the recognition of Mark’s emphasis on “Son of God” and Luke’s apologetic for the legality of Christianity account for such drastic editing.

H. HARMONIZATION

The last examples above form a natural bridge to this final category of solutions to discrepancies between Synoptic parallels. In certain limited instances—especially where the Gospel writers greatly abbreviate accounts of complex events that occur in several stages or over long periods of time—applications of harmonization in its narrower, additive sense do seem justified.

1. George E. Ladd’s reconstruction of the sequence of events surrounding Jesus’ resurrection offers a good example. The four Evangelists chose to record primarily divergent features of a complex Easter-event, yet without entangling themselves in any necessary historical contradictions.¹²⁴ For shorter narratives, however, usually some type of external evidence that key details are missing is needed before one can feel very comfortable with harmonization.

2. For example, Luke’s love of logical inversion leads one to suspect that, for some topical purpose, he has simply switched the order of the bread and the cup in his account of the Last Supper (Lk 22:15–19a/cf. Mk 14:22–25). No such purpose, however, readily presents itself, and familiarity with the *four* cups drunk during the Passover haggadah makes probable the explanation that Luke and Mark are referring to different portions of the ceremony. The resurgent favor with which text critics look upon Luke 22:19b–20 greatly enhances this hypothesis.²⁵

3. Or consider the “trials” of Jesus before the Sanhedrin (Mk 14:55–65, 15:1/Lk 22:66–71). The discrepancy between Mark’s nighttime and Luke’s daytime hearings seems inescapable until one realizes that the Sanhedrin probably could not reach a legal verdict at night and that Mark 15:1a refers to some type of brief postdawn proceedings.¹²⁶ Yet, in their ecstasy of finally having captured Jesus, it is historically incredible that the Jewish authorities should not have begun the unofficial nighttime interrogation that Mark depicts.¹²⁷ The only obstacle to this reconstruction lies in the close similarity between the Markan and Lukan dialogues. Would Jesus so graciously have indicted Himself a second time (Lk 22:69), even despite His more muted response (vv 67–68, 70)? Yet, even a veiled affirmative (v 70) to the question of His identity with the Son of God would have satisfied the Sanhedrin, and Luke may have simply assimilated additions from Mark’s narrative into his own version, knowing that the council had, in some sense, to repeat its agenda. As Carson cautions,

the sad fact is that there are few methodologically reliable tools for distinguishing between, say, two forms of one aphoristic saying, two reports

of the same saying uttered on two occasions, or one report of one such saying often repeated in various forms but preserved in the tradition in one form (surely not problematic if only the *ipsissima vox* is usually what is at stake).¹²⁸

Although the trial narratives are not aphorisms, the proposed assimilations involve only brief, memorable utterances, so an application of Carson’s principle to this new situation seems safe.

4. Additional applications of straightforward harmonizing seem plausible for the famous examples of character doubling (two blind men—Mt 20:30/cf. Mk 10:46; two demoniacs—Mt 8:28/cf. Mk 5:2; two men by the empty tomb—Lk 24:4/cf. Mk 16:5). If there were two, then obviously there was one. Examples of such doubling are too rare to attribute them to either form or redaction-critical processes, and the Evangelists make nothing of the additions.¹²⁹ Harmonization seems sanest; one member of a pair (or group) often stands out from the other(s) and thereby receives exclusive attention. In the Gospels, this focus usually falls on the person who acts as a spokesman.¹³⁰

I. CONCLUSIONS

This survey of problem passages has admittedly proved sketchy. Some will prefer solutions for certain passages different than those suggested here. Appreciation of the categories of types of solutions and of the principles involved in applying them is more important than complete agreement with the category chosen under which to subsume each individual illustration. As Carl Henry stresses, “evangelical scholars do not insist that historical realities conform to all their proposals for harmonization; their intent, rather, is to show that their premises do not cancel the logical possibility of reconciling apparently divergent reports.”¹³¹

Two fundamental conclusions, however, do merit more widespread acceptance than they have received. First, “additive” harmonization is entirely legitimate as one among many tools for alleviating tension between Gospel parallels, but a survey of the classic “contradictions” suggests that in most cases it is not the best tool. Second, the newer branches of Gospel study (source, form, and redaction criticism), far from necessarily proving Scripture’s errancy, regularly enable the exegete to reconcile apparent contradictions in a much less contrived and artificial manner than traditional harmonization. Of course, complex problems regularly require a combination of methods, and the innovative conjunction of redaction criticism with harmonization emerges as a powerful but little-used tool for breaking down some of the most resistant barriers to belief in the accuracy of the Evangelists’ narratives.

IV. OTHER BIBLICAL AND EXTRABIBLICAL PARALLELS

The methods for solving conflicts among the Synoptics have not developed in a vacuum but out of the study of the other historical writings in Scripture along with noncanonical literature, both religious and secular. If the principles outlined here have any validity, then they should also suggest solutions to seeming discrepancies between other pairs of paralleled narratives. In fact, that is precisely what happens. The conclusions of this final major section of our study show divergences among “synoptic” corpora elsewhere in ancient historiography yielding to the same spectrum of solutions as employed with Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The other main “synoptic” problem in the New Testament contrasts Acts with autobiographical portions of the Pauline epistles. Conservatives have regularly emphasized that much of the tension between Acts and Paul dissipates when the distinctive genres and purposes of the different books receive due emphasis, while the critical consensus clings to skepticism concerning the historical accuracy of Acts. Ironically, the more liberal approach thus downplays the redaction-critical type of argument that the conservatives utilize, although neither “camp” seems aware that it is taking a different position from the one it generally adopts when studying the Gospels. But more closely analogous to the problems of harmonizing the Synoptics are some examples further removed from the New Testament, to which we now turn.

A. CHRONICLES-KINGS

The classic problem of the Old Testament contrasts the works of the Chronicler and the so-called Deuteronomic historian. Chmniolos has generally received short shrift in scholarly circles, but recent studies have rehabilitated the reputation of its author as a theologian¹³² and even to a limited extent as a historian.¹³³ In fact, all eight categories applied to Synoptic divergences come into play in a study of Chronicles.

1. The Old Testament autographs prove vastly more difficult to reconstruct than their New Testament counterparts. The undeniable contradictions that punctuate the extant texts of Samuel through Chronicles most likely reflect copyists’ errors. Numbers and names have become distorted most easily; on the former, John Wenham cogently stresses that “the more absurd the figures the less likely it is that they were invented,” and the “absurdity suggests the likelihood that someone has been trying to transmit records faithfully, in spite of the fact that they do not seem to make sense.”¹³⁴ Wenham itemizes eight types of textual corruption and then discusses at length twelve possible meanings of אלף besides “thousand.”¹³⁵ J. Barton Payne supplements Wenham with an exhaustive listing of the 213 numerals

that Chronicles contains for which parallels occur elsewhere in Scripture, and he notes that only nineteen create contradictions. The maxim that Chronicles consistently embellished its sources fails utterly—and all the more so since it contains the higher of the divergent figures in only eleven of the nineteen cases.¹³⁶

A more famous contradiction pits Elhanan against David as the slayer of Goliath (cf. 1Ch 20:5 with 1Sa 17:4,7,50 and 2Sa 21:19). The Chronicler has preserved what was most likely the original text of 2 Samuel, with Elhanan slaying Lahmi the brother of Goliath and not Goliath himself. It is easy to see how $\text{אֶת־לַחְמִי־אָחִי־גִלְיָת}$ could give rise to $\text{בֵּית־לַחְמִי־אֶת־גִּלְיָת}$.¹³⁷ Interestingly, traditional Jewish exegesis opts for a less likely, additive harmonization in which there were two different giants with the same name or title!¹³⁸

2. Contextual analysis suggests that the “help” Tiglath-pileser gave Ahaz (2Ki 16:7–9) proved short-lived and misguided, so that the Chronicles can deliver the verdict of a later generation that Ahaz received *no* help (2Ch 28:16,21). Chronicles also uses the word “war” in a sense that excludes minor border skirmishes, so that it can claim that Asa and Baasha lived in peace with each other for twenty years (2Ch 15:10,19) despite the apparent disagreement of 1 Kings 15:16.¹³⁹ An appreciation of the Chronicler’s redactional motives makes both of these linguistic explanations intelligible, since he sought to summarize each king’s reign with sweeping, moralistic generalizations.

More controversial are some apparent representational changes. Did Solomon’s “molten sea” hold two thousand (1Ki 7:23–26) or three thousand baths (2Ch 4:2–5)? Wenham and Payne favor textual corruption; Curtis and Madsen, a historical error; and the Targums harmonize by assuming that one bath is a dry and the other a liquid measure.¹⁴⁰ Evidence shows, though, that the capacity of a bath had changed over time, so that Chronicles alters the number precisely to preserve the original measure, just as English translations often provide British or American equivalents.⁴¹

The Chronicler similarly turns the temple guard, including foreign mercenaries (Carites), into Levites (2Ch 23:1–11/2Ki 11:4–12, 2Ch 24:4–14a/2Ki 12:4–16). The typical conservative harmonization that centuries, Carites, and Levites all worked together¹⁴² does not seem to do justice either to the Chronicler’s overwhelming preoccupation with the Levites or to their almost total absence from all of Samuel-Kings (Chronicles-99 times, Samuel-Kings-3 times). The critical consensus still concludes that no Levites functioned during the early monarchy, because it is thought that that part of the “mosaic” code did not develop until later; but this requires the references that do occur in the Deuteronomist’s work (note also the 14 in Joshua and 10 in Judges) all to be later interpolations. May not a mediating view that sees a contemporization occurring prove best? As R. J. Coggins says, “we should not dismiss this as falsification;

the Chronicler is concerned to tell the story in terms that would be appropriate for his own day, when there was no closer equivalent to a royal bodyguard than the religious leaders of Jerusalem.¹⁴³ Goldingay concurs: "Thus he describes as Levites those who would have been Levites in his day."¹⁴⁴

3. The most famous illustration of extrabiblical history helping to solve discrepancies within Kings-Chronicles involves the Assyrian king lists aiding in synchronizing the chronology of the Israelite and Judean kings' reigns. The scholar who almost single-handedly discovered a reconciliation for all the apparently conflicting data is Edwin R. Thiele.¹⁴⁵ The type of critique that his work deserves far outstrips the bounds of this study, and several of the problems that he solves by historical criticism may instead reflect textual corruption.¹⁴⁶ Siegfried Horn, nevertheless, concludes that "Thiele's chronological scheme with its logic and historical integrity has gradually become accepted by an everwidening circle of biblical scholars of all persuasions."¹⁴⁷

4. Almost no form-critical study of Chronicles exists, primarily because its author claims to have worked almost exclusively from written sources (1Ch 29:29; 2Ch 9:29; 12:15; etc.). Nevertheless, he occasionally presents a narrative more abbreviated and freely rewritten than typically; perhaps the tendencies of oral tradition account for a few of these (esp. 1Ki 3:6-14 and 2Ch 1:9-12).

5. Audience criticism also rarely enters into the study of Kings-Chronicles, but 1 Chronicles 23:1 and 29:22 present one apparent doublet. Was Solomon really proclaimed king of Israel twice? The contexts suggest that the first ceremony involved only Israel's leaders, while the second enacted David's decree in front of all the people of Jerusalem.

6. On the other hand, source criticism looms even larger in the study of Kings and Chronicles than it did for the Synoptics. The detailed lists of sources scattered throughout these works makes their unparalleled material readily attributable to these long-lost documents. One "microlevel" and one "macrolevel" example illustrate further. First, the Chronicler lists additional "mighty men" of David not found in his primary source (1Ch 11:41b-47/2Sa 23:24-39). Stylistic variations and authentic trans-Jordanian locations suggest that this material stems from a different source—one that supplements the earlier list rather than contradicting it.¹⁴⁸ Second, the most striking omission of 1 and 2 Chronicles is the large amount of information about the court history of David and about Elijah and Elisha. Since some of this material could have enhanced the Chronicler's narrative and coheres with his purposes, the omission proves puzzling. Yet recent studies favor viewing the "succession narrative" and the Elijah-Elisha cycles as independent sources supplementing the Deuteronomic's work; thus, A. G. Auld speculates that the Chronicler simply may not have had access to them.¹⁴⁹

7. Redaction criticism again combines with harmonization to solve two of the strangest differences between the Chronicles and the Deuteronomic—one very famous and one rather obscure. The classic "contradiction" comes with David's infamous census. Did God or Satan move David to number Israel (2Sa 24:1/1Ch 21:1)? Almost all agree that the Chronicler wanted to avoid the mistaken inference that God directly causes evil, and more conservative commentators stress that Scripture always portrays Satan as subordinate to God.¹⁵⁰ Chronicles, therefore, does not contradict Samuel. The Targum to 1 Chronicles 21:1, in fact, conflates the two, having Yahweh incite Satan to move David to number Israel! As with the pericopae of the rich young ruler and Jesus, a canonical writer markedly alters his source—but for the very purpose of preventing a tragic misinterpretation of it. Redaction criticism supplies the motive for the change and rescues an accompanying harmonization from the charge of being arbitrary.

A second illustration comes from a comparison of 2 Chronicles 2:13-14 with 1 Kings 7:13-14. Was Hiram-abi's mother from Dan or Naphtali? The contiguity of these two territories makes a mistake unlikely and points toward Dillard's harmonization as the most probable of several proposed; one is her geographical residence and the other her genealogical relationship. But why would Chronicles bother to notice this? Dillard continues: "rather than be distracted by a harmonistic problem, it is more important in this case to see that the Chronicler has assigned Hiram-abi a Danite ancestry to perfect further the parallel with Oholiab."¹⁵¹ Oholiab, from the tribe of Dan, was one of the two master craftsmen who constructed much of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex 38:22-23), and many commentators have noted that the Chronicler viewed Solomon and Hiram (the suffix *-abi* actually means "my master") and their work in God's temple in a similar light. Redaction criticism explains even an obscure change from Kings to Chronicles and prevents the inference that either author erred.

8. 'Additive' harmonization has already come into play in the previous two examples; two others afford instances of its use apart from other critical tools. The last pair of parallels notes also that Hiram comes from Tyre, but so does the king of that city who has the identical name (2Ch 2:11). Surprisingly, I have not discovered anyone claiming that these texts should not be harmonized and taken to refer to two different people, presumably because Solomon could scarcely have conscripted a foreign king into manual labor (1Ki 7:13). But then similar harmonizations elsewhere should not receive the undue scorn sometimes unleashed. A second example involves the sources for Asa's reign. Were the rest of his actions recorded in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (1Ki 15:23) or in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel (2Ch 16:11)? The proliferation of sources cited in

Kings and *Chronicles* makes “both” the most likely answer; it is even possible that the two names refer to the same work.¹⁵²

The conclusions arising at the end of this survey strikingly resemble those from the study of the Synoptics. None of the “contradictions” cited proves irreconcilable with its parallel, but harmonization, narrowly defined, is only a relatively unimportant tool among many for solving the various problems. In some instances, however, its legitimacy increases as it joins hands with redaction criticism to provide probable solutions, when either method alone would fall far short of convincing.

B. THE WRITINGS OF JOSEPHUS

Turning to extracanonical Jewish literature, one might study the synoptic problems that surface from a comparison of the midrashim with the Old Testament¹⁵³ or of the different Targums with each other.¹⁵⁴ But critical texts, translations, concordances, and redactional analyses of these works are frequently lacking; more groundwork is needed than can be laid in a survey of this nature. Robert Johnston’s comprehensive catalogue of the Tannaitic parables provides such a foundation for a comparison of parallels within that corpus;¹⁵⁵ I have elsewhere begun such a comparison and there noted that the types of changes between parallels often closely mirror the development of the Synoptic tradition, while rarely precluding the preservation of the *ipsissima vox* of the original rabbinic speakers.¹⁵⁶

Among Hellenistic Jewish sources, the critical tools are more developed, and perhaps the most significant parallels for comparison come from the works of Josephus. Historical overlap occurs between the *Antiquities* and the Old Testament (including the Apocrypha),¹⁵⁷ and between the *War* and the *Life*,¹⁵⁸ but the closest parallels to the problems already encountered in Scripture seem to emerge from a comparison of the later *Antiquities* and the earlier *War*.¹⁵⁹ Because the same author penned both works, attempts to reconcile conflicts between the narratives are all the more appropriate, unless one assumes that he either corrected or forgot his earlier writing.

1. Students of Josephus have regularly attributed his inflated figures for populations, armies, and casualties to a tendency to embellish, but textual corruption is increasingly becoming a more satisfactory solution. The parallels with *Kings-Chronicles* are obvious. Cohen’s caution, that “prudence dictates that we refrain from any conclusions [of historical inaccuracy] based on these variations,”¹⁶⁰ needs regular repetition in biblical circles. A. Byatt, in fact, argues that the figures Josephus gives are actually more often consistent with other historical data than is usually recognized. ““

2. Did Herod see his enemies run past him when he was outside or inside of his bathhouse (*War* 1:340/*Ant.* 14:462)? Grammatical analysis removes the apparent discrepancy. The use of the participle

in the former instead of the preposition plus infinitive in the latter (*εἰσελθών/πρὶν . . . εἰσελθεῖν*) creates some ambiguity and is probably circumstantial rather than temporal. Since Josephus seldom quotes himself verbatim, the change is probably entirely stylistic. Did Herod order the immediate (*παραχρῆμα*) execution of both Mariamme and Joseph (*War* 1:444), or did he pardon Mariamme until the later death of Soemius (*Ant.* 15:80–87, 218–31)? The *War* probably just omitted the latter detail for brevity’s sake; “immediately” is merely a literary device to dramatize the story (cf. Mark’s consistent use of *εὐθύς*).

3. Could there really have been two different Sanballat’s who opposed Israel in similar fashion (*Ant.* 11:7–8/*Ne* 2–6)? The discovery of additional historical data in the Samaria papyri corroborates Josephus’ record and validates a harmonization that many previously rejected outright.¹⁶²

4. Form criticism scarcely enters into a comparison of Josephus’ works, since it is implausible to imagine either his writing circulating in oral tradition or his dependence on such a tradition in subsequent historical composition. This is regularly the case with extrabiblical literature, as Bruce Waltke has emphasized, although his wholesale rejection of *Traditionsgeschichte* remains rather extreme.¹⁸³

5. Did Agrippa pray for Tiberius’ death and Gaius’ accession at a feast or during a chariot ride (*War* 2:178–80/*Ant.* 18:168)? The narratives otherwise differ markedly; the audience-critical presumption in favor of two different events gains credence when one realizes that Agrippa courted Gaius over a considerable period of time. The wording of the prayers, moreover, reveals no verbal parallelism apart from the names of the two men, although Josephus’ redactional style precludes any wide-ranging deductions from this fact.

6. Source criticism has dominated Josephus study even more than it did with *Kings-Chronicles*. Where Josephus cites no source, he is generally very brief, suggesting that he does not fill the gaps in his sources with creative invention.¹⁶⁴ Even those briefer sections probably rely on unidentified writings, as recent comparisons with the Babylonian chronicles demonstrate.⁶⁵

7. Redaction criticism of Josephus remains in its infancy, but great strides have been taken.¹⁶⁶ Both the *Antiquities* and the *War* disclose dominant themes and interpretations with which Josephus’ contemporaries would not always have agreed, but neither is demonstrably more or less historical than the other, at least with respect to first-century events.¹⁶⁷ Josephus’ paraphrastic style reminds us, as F. G. Downing puts it, that “it is not the divergencies among the synoptists (or even between them and John), in parallel contexts, that are remarkable; it is the extraordinary extent of verbal similarities.” Again, “the relationship may betoken a much greater respect, one for the other, even than Josephus’ for Scripture.”¹⁶⁸

An excellent example of more “theological” editing emerges in *Antiquities* 14:177–84 and *War* 1:212–13. In the former, Hyrcanus advises Hemd to flee Jerusalem due to the Sanhedrin’s murderous plots; in the latter, Hemd imagines (ὑπολαμβάνω) that his escape was contrary to the king’s wishes. But Hemd could have easily imagined that Hyrcanus’ advice was a trap due to the ongoing enmity between the two men (cf. *War* 1:214, *Ant.* 14:180). More importantly, the motives for the shift in perspective seem clear. In the *War*, Josephus tries to discredit his countrymen who defied what he viewed as the providentially-ordained Roman empire, and this highlighting of internal Jewish conflict colors his narrative of earlier history as well. In the *Antiquities*, though, he deals more dispassionately with this material in order to portray Jewish history as positively as possible, as he defends the merits of his heritage before a pagan audience.

8. An obvious candidate for simple harmonization comes with *Antiquities* 19:188 (“four cohorts who regarded freedom from imperial rule as more honorable than tyranny”) and *War* 2:205 (“three that remained loyal”). Neither passage claims that its number is a total, despite the impressions of some English translations.¹⁶⁹ Perhaps Josephus leaned of an extra character involved in those not too distant events (ca. A.D. 41) and so augmented the number in his later work.

The above illustrations do not pmve that all of the discrepancies among Josephus’ writings can be eliminated. Perhaps even some of the examples cited here are simple errors on his part. But as with our previous surveys, the point is to note the wide spectrum of methods-harmonization included but not dominant-that seem in many instances to vindicate the general reliability of the author. No theological commitments lead any Josephan scholar always to seek for an alleviation of tension between parallels in the way that they do for conservative students of Scripture. But a catena of quotations fmm Rajak’s masterful study makes one pause to consider their *a fortiori* application to the biblical literature: “as long as what Josephus tells us is *possible*, we have no right to correct it,” “if we find no internal gmunds for impugning the historian’s story, then, in the absence of evidence from outside, it must have *prima facie* claim on our belief,” and “Josephus’ story, the best we have for the Jewish revolt, is the one that should stand.”¹⁷⁰ Rajak herself regularly offers examples of harmonization in both its broad and narmw sense to vindicate Josephus’ accuracy;⁷¹ how much more ought biblical scholars abandon once and for all the notion that attempts to reconcile apparent tensions in Scripture as somehow unscientific or only confessionally motivated!

C. ARRIAN’S AND PLUTARCH’S LIVES OF ALEXANDER

Examples from historians in every historical period could be endlessly multiplied to pmve this last point. This survey will conclude, however, with only one more, this time from secular Greek historiography. C. B. Welles summarizes the reasons for choosing the biographies of Alexander the Great as an apt parallel to the Synoptic problems for harmonization:

Usually in Ancient History we are confronted with fragmentary and inadequate sources, from which the most probable story must be reconstructed, or, more rarely, with a single overpowering source from which we vainly struggle to escape: a Thucydides or a Tacitus. The pblem of Alexander is comparable, actually, only to the problem of Jesus. In both cases there exists ample evidence, each appropriate to the career and importance of the individual. In both cases the evidence is a generation or two later than the events in question . and in both cases the evidence is contradictory and tendentious.¹⁷²

In the case of the canonical evidence for Jesus, “apparently contradictory” is a more accurate assessment, but otherwise Welles’ analysis stands. The discussion here will limit itself to Alexander’s Greek biographers (Arrian and Plutarch); if the later Latin writers were added (Quintus Curtius, Diodorus, and Justin), a short treatment would become impossible. Generally, though, this so-called “Vulgate” tradition is not held to contain nearly as much reliable history,¹⁷³ so its omission from this survey seems justified. Parallels with the Gospels also extend to the emergence of apocryphal, legendary traditions, but these later “Alexander-romances” are sufficiently separated in time fmm his historians that they too may be passed over?⁷⁴

An important difference between Arrian and Plutarch on the one hand and Matthew, Mark, and Luke on the other is that the former often admit that their sources contradict each other and that they have had to choose among them or attempt a harmonization (see, e.g., *Anab.* 2:12.8 or 3:30.5).¹⁷⁵ They agree that Aristobulus and Ptolemy provide the most reliable eyewitness testimony, though even here they make no pretense for the inerrancy of their most trusted authorities (see esp. *Anab.* 4:14.3–4). Alan Wardman elaborates:

It was an accepted practice for ancient historians to decide between different or conflicting versions of the same event by appealing to the criterion of probability. As source criticism in the modern sense was virtually unknown, writers could do little else than keep in mind the more obvious bias or prejudice of their sources and follow what seemed to be the more likely account.⁷⁶

Yet even this “crude” method resembles modern redaction criticism more than traditional harmonization, reinforcing the claim of the

former to an ancient pedigree. Oral tradition also comes into play, as many ancient historians wrote from a combination of notes and highly trained (though fallible) memories.¹⁷⁷ Occasionally form-critical processes will therefore reveal themselves, too. In fact, once again all eight of the categories utilized throughout this article take turns in accounting for discrepancies between Arrian and Plutarch.

1. Textual corruption again plagues the transmission of numbers. Arrian, for example, allows Alexander not much more (*οὐ πολλῶ πλείους*) than 30,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry for his march to the Hellespont (*Anab.* 1:11.2). Plutarch frankly admits that his sources vary, with figures from 30,000 to 43,000 footmen and from 4,000 to 5,000 horses (*Alex.* 15:1). A. B. Bosworth, nevertheless, offers an additive harmonization by claiming it “extremely likely” that the higher figures “include the forces already across” the river,¹⁷⁸ while P. A. Brunt believes they include additional mercenaries.¹⁷⁹ Here are two expert, contemporary classicists putting forward the very type of harmonizations that most biblical critics would reject out of hand if they came from Evangelicals.

2. When they heard of Alexander’s conquest of Thebes, did the Athenians abandon their mystery festivals because of consternation (*ἔκπλαγέντες*—*Anab.* 1:10.2) or due to mourning (*ὑπὸ πένθους*—*Alex.* 13:1)? The semantic overlap between these expressions suggests that one need reject neither, although Hamilton correctly points out that Arrian is more precise.¹⁸⁰ A linguistic solution similarly accounts for a more trivial discrepancy involving names, yet one that is regularly paralleled in biblical orthographic variation (recall the example of the “Gadarene” demoniac). In *Alexander* 66:1, Plutarch notes that Alexander calls a certain island *Σκιλλοῦστιν* whereas others call it *Ψιλτοῦκιν*. Arrian accounts for the disagreement; neither is completely precise, for the natives name their homeland *Κιλλουτά* (*Anab.* 6:19.3).

3. New historical data have made plausible one of the most incredible episodes in Alexander’s adventures, the crossing of the ravine to the Rock of Chorienes by the impromptu erection of a massive causeway of tree trunks. Arrian describes the bridge-work done from above and below, requiring the narrowest part of the valley to be somewhere between the top and the bottom (*Anab.* 4:21). Sir Aurel Stein discovered a ravine of approximately the right shape and size at Aornos,¹⁸¹ so that J. G. Lloyd can claim: “At first reading Arrian’s account of its capture seems impossible. No man and no army could achieve such things. But archaeology has proved it. The site is as Arrian describes, and Alexander virtually redesigned the landscape to make the hill accessible.”¹⁸²

4. As with Chronicles and Josephus, Plutarch and Arrian depend primarily upon written sources for their information, so form-critical tendencies appear only occasionally. The virtually complete lack of

verbal parallelism between these historians of Alexander—even where they are following the same source and including the same sequence of details—highlights the occasional exception all the more. A few memorable sayings appear in almost identical form in both; these suggest careful transmission in oral tradition. Three good examples involve (a) the oracle of Orpheus, when Aristandrus commanded Alexander to cheer up (*Anab.* 1:11.2/*Alex.* 14:5), (b) the description of Alexander breaking the Gordian knot (*Anab.* 2:3.7/*Alex.* 18:2), and (c) Alexander’s rejection of Callisthenes’ kiss (*Anab.* 4:12.5/*Alex.* 54:4). In other instances, closely paralleled content (i.e., conceptual rather than verbal parallelism) will suddenly intrude into otherwise highly divergent (noncomplementary, though usually non-contradictory) narratives, thus lending credence to the singly attested material as well. Two illustrations here arise out of the stories of Alexander and Parmenio crossing the Granicus (*Anab.* 1:13.6–7/*Alex.* 16:2–3) and Cleitus taunting Alexander (*Anab.* 4:8/*Alex.* 50–54).

5. The similar missions of Phrataphemes and Stasanor during subsequent winters (329–28, 328–27 B.C.) lead Bosworth to label them doublets (*Anab.* 4:7.1, 18.1),¹⁸³ but audience criticism corroborates Arrian. In the first passage, the two men have returned from arresting Arsames, Barzanes, and the rebel compatriots of Bessus; in the latter, Alexander dispatches Phrataphemes to bring back Autophradates and Stasanor to become satrap of Media. The similarities between passages are clearly quite meager. An example of apparently conflicting audiences between Plutarch and Arrian also proves harmonizable. Who advised Alexander to attack Darius by night at Gaugamela—Parmenio only (*Anab.* 3:10.1) or a group of lower-ranking advisors (*Alex.* 31:6)? Plutarch’s earlier mention of Parmenio (*Alex.* 31:6) actually suggests he was part of the group, while Arrian’s later reference to others who were listening (*Anab.* 3:10.2) also shows that Parmenio was not alone.

6. Regular reference to explicit sources throughout the lives of Alexander makes a written origin for undocumented material again very probable. An interesting phenomenon noted also in Josephus strengthens traditional views of Synoptic literary dependence. Even where Arrian and Plutarch narrate the same event from the same source, verbal parallelism is virtually absent. As noted above, the rare exceptions are often attributable to oral tradition, suggesting that ancient historians felt a need to rephrase their sources, even when they had nothing new to add.⁸⁴

This should warn the Synoptic scholar against too quickly reading major implications into minor differences between parallels, and it should also strengthen the Q-hypothesis. Gospel commentators are used to observing the greater variation between Matthew’s and Luke’s shared material than between either of those Evangelists and Mark. Reading other parallel histories of antiquity, however,

underlines the marked parallelism between Matthew and Luke that does exist. The linguistic evidence for some type of Q considerably outweighs that for written sources behind Josephus or the Alexander-historians, where such sources are undeniable!

7. More so than for Chronicles or Josephus, a redactional study of Alexander's biographers reveals periodic interruptions of a basically chronological narrative with topical digressions. Plutarch is especially this way (e.g., *Alex.* 21:5–23; 28; and 39:1–42:4, which illuminate Alexander's self-control, attitude toward divinity, and generosity or loyalty, respectively),¹⁸⁵ but Arrian also evidences "dischronologization." For example, he explicitly acknowledges that "all this which took place not long afterwards, I have related as part of the story of Cleitus, regarding it as really akin to Cleitus' story for the purpose of narration" (*Anab.* 4:14.3–4). Such topical narration may well account for the baffling differences between Plutarch and Arrian on the dating of Darius' embassy to Alexander proposing an early truce (*Anab.* 2:25.1—during the siege of Tyre; *Alex.* 29:4—after returning from the Egyptian oracle to Phoenicia). Bosworth assumes that Arrian has erred, while Hamilton distrusts Plutarch;¹⁸⁶ the tendency to prefer the testimony of any source other than that on which one is commenting seems to extend outside of biblical circles! Yet it seems plausible that Plutarch is simply writing topically at this point. He links his new material to the previous paragraph only loosely (*δέ*), 28:1 suggests the theme that connects the passages ("In general, he bore himself haughtily toward the barbarians"), and 31:1 clearly resumes a chronological outline.

Redaction criticism can also identify clear emphases and "biases" distinguishing Arrian from Plutarch. Arrian's work is an "encomium," noticeably paralleling Chronicles' preference for praiseworthy material dealing with public—and especially military—accomplishments. Plutarch, on the other hand, "psychologizes" by probing into Alexander's inner motives and recounting more private events, not unlike the presentation of John *vis-à-vis* the Synoptics.

These distinctives may explain the contrasting depictions of Alexander's response to Parmenio's urgent cry for help in the battle of Gaugamela. According to Arrian, he rushes to help him at once (*Anab.* 3:15.1), while Plutarch portrays him rebuking Parmenio's embassy (*Alex.* 32:4). Yet Plutarch narrates a second summons for which Arrian has no parallel; and Alexander eventually does leave his phalanx (*Alex.* 33:7). Arrian seems similarly incomplete, and 3:15.5 *basis* offers incidental corroboration of Plutarch's version; Alexander rests his cavalry *ἐπὶ μέσανόκτας*, implying that the battle took longer than a superficial reading might suggest. A complete harmonization may no longer be possible, but Hamilton agrees that Plutarch's sources "evidently spoke of two requests" (and the "Vulgate" tradition corroborates this hypothesis).¹⁸⁷ Alexander probably scorned the first

plea for help but responded to the second. More importantly, redaction criticism justifies our historians' selectivity. Philip Stadter's assessment of Arrian's silence merits acceptance:

The omissions for which Arrian has been faulted, such as his silence on the efforts for the Persian right wing under Mazaeus to outflank Parmenio, seem for the most part the result not of ignorance, or confusion, or of the limited scope of Ptolemy's narrative, but of deliberate decision. Throughout Arrian concentrates on the essentials, making clear the sequence of the events and the tactical genius of Alexander. He avoids completely the romantic, the spectacular, the melodramatic which so dominate our other sources.¹⁸⁸

8. A straightforward harmonization suggests itself for the problem of how many soldiers had statues erected in their honor after the battle of the river Granicus. Plutarch cites Aristobulus, who records that nine footmen out of thirty-four on Alexander's side were memorialized in this manner (*Alex.* 16:7–8). Arrian, however, awards the honor to twenty-five territorial troops (*ἐτραίρων*—*Anab.* 1:16.4). Is it pure coincidence that $25 + 9 = 34$, or might it not make sense to assume that both authors are correct?

There are probable errors in Arrian and Plutarch; and, again, a few of the passages surveyed may just contain simple mistakes. As with Josephus, though, such errors are not the focus of attention. Rather, the findings of this section again reinforce the general historical trustworthiness of the authors studied; parallel problems in Scripture should seem rather less insoluble as a result.

V. CONCLUSION

The results of these studies of the Synoptics, Chronicles, Josephus, and Alexander dovetail remarkably. The more one studies extrabiblical historiography, the more inescapable the legitimacy of harmonization becomes, even in its narrower, additive sense. At the same time, even the least tendential of annals reveals principles of selectivity that justify a thoroughgoing application of redaction criticism and, although usually less significant, of all of the other branches of literary and historical criticism as well.

Yet what applies to noncanonical literature applies, *mutatis mutandi*, to the biblical writings. As A. Momigliano emphasizes, the problems of understanding the text, discovering sources, and determining the truth are basically the same for both biblical and Greco-Roman history.¹⁸⁹ But, as he continues, the really serious problem of the day is the "widespread tendency ... to treat historiography as another genre of fiction."¹⁹⁰ A reassessment of the historical accuracy of more than one ancient document is in order. For the results to be unprejudiced, apparent discrepancies between paralleled texts should be subjected to all eight of the methods enumerated above

(and these may, in turn, be subdivided or combined in many ways) to see if any yield plausible explanations. Until this has been done, any verdict that equates a given discrepancy with a genuine error will have to remain suspect. In addition, utilizing one category to suggest an implausible solution does not mean that another category may not supply a perfectly valid one.

As for the biblical texts in particular, the sample of some of the most obvious candidates for errors in the Gospels and Chronicles shows that this presumption is rash; all can be explained, even if competing explanations are not equally probable. The tools of higher criticism not only do not have to be viewed as inherently destructive but can, in fact, join hands with traditional harmonization in the service of a high view of Scripture.

John D. Woodbridge

John D. Woodbridge is Professor and Chairman of the Department of Church History at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois. He is a graduate of Wheaton College (B.A.), Michigan State University (M.A.), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (M.Div.), and the University of Toulouse (Doctorat de troisième cycle). He has written *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*, co-authored *The Gospel in America: Themes in the Story of America's Evangelicals* (with Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll), edited *Renewing Your Mind in a Secular World*, co-edited four other books, and contributed chapters and articles to numerous other publications.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF THE “ENLIGHTENMENT” ON THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

I. THE CURRENT DEBATE

Orthodoxies of historical interpretation are often imposing edifices. Even when compelling evidence demonstrates that they are built on shifting foundations, they do not usually collapse in a heap. Those interpretations that commend a theological system are especially resistant to criticism.

Recently, I spoke with a distinguished German scholar about Luther's views of biblical authority. The professor's comments confirm how difficult it is to challenge "accepted" historical interpretations. One segment of the conversation went something like this:

"Did Martin Luther believe that the Bible was without error?"

"Yes."

"Did Martin Luther include within the purview of biblical authority the natural world?"

"Yes. Neoorthodox writers of this century created the idea that Lutherans of the sixteenth century did not think that the Bible spoke about the natural world. I published a volume by a Lutheran theologian of the sixteenth century who used the Bible as his source-book for a discussion of birds, fish, and animals. My study was not welcomed by some scholars in Germany, given its implications. It was published in Austria."

Here was a renowned specialist, with apparently no theological brief to deliver, who acknowledged without hesitation that Martin Luther upheld complete biblical infallibility and that it was a neoorthodox historiography that had contributed to a widespread misunderstanding of Luther and early Lutherans on that point.

This exchange with the professor underscores an age-old problem: the theological presuppositions of historians (including the present writer) sometimes get in the way of their honest effort to write scrupulously fair history. The spate of recent interpretations regarding the history of biblical authority may mirror the theological presuppositions of their authors more than unwary readers might suppose.

What has prompted the renewed interest in the history of biblical authority within recent decades?¹ Several eminent historians have

turned to the topic because they are students of “secularism” and of “culture.” They want to determine how the Bible lost its status as an authoritative, divinely inspired book in the minds of many Europeans or how its teachings helped shape a particular culture at a particular time. Other historians have written on the subject, motivated by a quest to legitimize their own beliefs. This seems especially true of several Roman Catholic theologians. At Vatican II, their church delimited the scope of biblical inerrancy to “that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation,” thereby generally excluding the domains of history and science from the purview of inerrancy? This was a new stance, perhaps dictated by the church’s desire to seek an accommodation with higher criticism and macmevolution. For centuries, Roman Catholics had taken it for granted that the church upheld the Bible’s complete infallibility (including the domains of history and science). Professor James T. Burtchaell of Notre Dame writes aptly:

Christians early inherited from the Jews the belief that the biblical writers were somehow possessed by God, who was thus to be reckoned the Bible’s proper author. Since God could not conceivably be the agent of falsehood, the Bible must be guaranteed free from any error. For centuries this doctrine lay dormant, as doctrines will: accepted by all, pondered by few. Not until the 16th century did inspiration and its corollary, inerrancy, come up for sustained review. The Reformers and Counter-Reformers were disputing whether all revealed truth was in Scripture alone, and whether it could be interpreted by private or by official scrutiny. Despite a radical disagreement on these issues both groups persevered in receiving the Bible as a compendium of inerrant oracles dictated by the Spirit.³

Post-Vatican II scholars sensed that the council’s delimitation of inerrancy to “salvation truths” had to be explained. Several like Oswald Loretz wrote essays and books attempting to demonstrate that the new delimitation corresponded to what Christians of earlier generations had believed.⁴ This concordance alone, it was felt, might help justify their claim that their church’s new statement continued to reflect “orthodoxy” in the best sense of that expression?

In their revisionist efforts, these Roman Catholic interpreters encountered a stubborn historiography that is very old. It has survived sharp criticisms from Johann Salomo Semler in the eighteenth century, Samuel Coleridge and Charles Briggs in the nineteenth, and Protestant liberal and neoorthodox historians in the twentieth. This historiography, summarized above by Professor Burtchaell, propounds the thesis that the so-called “central tradition” of the church retained the doctrine of biblical inerrancy until at least the eighteenth century.

For many contemporary critics this historiography has uncomfortable implications. It suggests quite strongly that their own beliefs

about biblical authority are innovative and have probably departed from the basic teachings of the Christian churches. These scholars prefer to view biblical inerrancy as a novel doctrine created during one era or another of church history; they want to represent their own beliefs as reflecting what the Bible teaches and what wise Christians of earlier generations believed.

But when, according to these scholars, was biblical inerrancy created, and who were its originators? Here differences of opinion begin to multiply. The candidates for originators of biblical inerrancy have been numerous. During the heyday of neoorthodoxy, prominent scholars propounded the thesis that biblical inerrancy was created by Protestant Scholastics who sought certitude in the truthfulness of written text rather than being content with the authority of Christ, whom one encounters in the text. The creation of the doctrine of inerrancy allegedly took place in the late sixteenth century and is particularly associated with the names of Lambert Daneau, Flacius Illyricus, and other second- and third-generation Protestants.⁶ With the recent work of Jill Raitt, Olivier Fatio, and Richard Muller, the historical synthesis sustaining a neoorthodox interpretation of theology is under considerable strain. Its very survival is in doubt.⁷

Persuasive monographs continue to appear that argue for greater continuity between the Reformers’ theological teachings and those of their descendants. Professor Geoffrey Bmmiley has well described the views of Scripture advocated by continental Protestant theologians of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as compared to the perspectives of Luther and Calvin:

In these writers the doctrine of scripture is no doubt entering on a new phase. Tendencies may be discerned in the presentation which give evidence of some movement away from the Reformation emphases. The movement, however, has not yet proceeded very far. The tendencies are only tendencies. What change there has been is more in style, or materially, in elaboration. The substance of the Reformation doctrine of scripture has not yet been altered, let alone abandoned.⁸

The neoorthodox historiography regarding the Bible is less persuasive today than it was in the 1940s and 1950s.⁹

In 1979 Professors Jack Rogers and Donald McKim published *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*.¹⁰ They moved the creation of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy back to the last decades of the seventeenth century, linking it to the work of Francis Turretin and the influence of Newton and Locke on theological reflection. In this fashion, Rogers and McKim, Presbyterians both, could deny that the Westminster divines’ commitment to biblical infallibility was equivalent to a commitment to biblical inerrancy. Obviously, if the Westminster divines drew up their Confession in the 1640s, they did so before the doctrine of biblical inerrancy was fully

fashioned.” For Professors Rogers and McKim, the Bible’s infallibility excludes purposeful deceptions but not “technical errors.” It is infallible in accomplishing its saving purpose, but not infallible for matters such as history, science, and geography.

In 1980 the study by Professors Rogers and McKim was voted “Book of the Year” by reviewers of *Eternity* magazine. But eventually criticism of the volume began to build.¹² A good number of historians and theologians were unprepared to accept its linchpin thesis that when Augustine, Luther, and Calvin indicated that the Bible was without error, they simply meant that it contained no “purposeful deceptions.” This criticism stemmed from writers whose own theological outlooks differed considerably. The Rogers and McKim proposal did not ultimately weather its reviews very well.

Perhaps the most subtle of the newer interpretations to challenge the older “stubborn historiography” regarding biblical inerrancy is one that emphasizes a distinction between formulations of biblical inerrancy before the mid-seventeenth century and modern formulations of the doctrine. This interpretation acknowledges that biblical inerrancy was indeed espoused by earlier Christians but that the formulation of the doctrine advocated by today’s proponents differs substantially from the one entertained by these earlier Christians. According to this interpretation, the modern formulation of biblical inerrancy is a product of “the scientific age and age of rationalism” (generally associated with the Enlightenment)?³

This proposal has been championed by Professor Bruce Vawter (a Roman Catholic scholar) and, to a certain extent, by Professor George Marsden (a Protestant specialist in the history of American Fundamentalism). Professor Vawter concedes that the church fathers advocated a belief in biblical inerrancy. However, he quickly adds the caveat that they, unlike many modern defenders of biblical inerrancy, coupled it to a doctrine of “condescension.” The doctrine of “condescension,” then, is a major variable that sets off the early church’s perception of biblical inerrancy from “Fundamentalist” conceptions of the same doctrine. Vawter explains:

The fathers did of course believe that the Bible was an inerrant and, if you will, an infallible repository of revealed religion; but from right to left, from John Chrysostom, let us say, to Theodore of Mopsuestia, by theological recourses like *synkatabasis*, “condescension,” to be discerned in the inspired word, they recognized its limitations and time-conditionedness in respect to a continually developing human awareness and factual knowledge which is also the gift of God.¹⁴

When did the later “Fundamentalist” doctrine of biblical inerrancy allegedly emerge? Professor Vawter perceives its origins in an age that is apparently associated with the “Enlightenment”:

“Biblical inerrancy” or “infallibility” in the fundamentalist sense, as has often been observed, is the product of the scientific age and the age of rationalism, a simplistic response to both. It is definitely not one of the authentic heritages of mainline Christianity.¹⁵

Professor Vawter’s influential interpretation is showcased in an essay that generally defends the Christian’s acceptance of macro-evolution.⁶

Professor George Marsden has drafted a proposal that shares several of the same features as the one proffered by Professor Vawter. Like Vawter, he allows that the premise that the Bible does not err is an old one. But then he associates the “Fundamentalist” doctrine of inerrancy with the Bible perceived as a scientific textbook. According to Professor Marsden, this latter doctrine differs from the way the biblical authors perceived the truthfulness of their accounts and from the way earlier Christians spoke about the “errorless” character of the Scriptures. He summarizes his argument in this striking way:

It is incorrect then to think of fundamentalist thought as premodern. Its views of God’s revelation, for example, although drawn from the Bible, are a long way from the modes of thought of the ancient Hebrews. For instance, fundamentalists’ intense insistence on the “inerrancy” of the Bible in scientific and historical detail is related to this modern style of thinking. Although the idea that Scripture does not err is an old one, fundamentalists accentuate it partly because they often view the Bible virtually as though it were a scientific treatise.¹⁷

For Marsden, the “Fundamentalist” doctrine of biblical inerrancy is based on the scientific model associated with Newtonism and Baconian inductivism.¹⁸ The impact of Common Sense philosophy also helped fashion its configuration.¹⁹ Dispensational writers of the nineteenth century who allegedly submitted to these influences were pivotal in shaping the doctrine. Marsden observes:

It was vital to the dispensationalists that their information be not only absolutely reliable but also precise. They considered the term “inerrancy” to carry this implication. Statements found in Scripture would not deviate from the exact truth. The importance of this assumption for prophetic interpretation is obvious. Precise numbers of years had to be calculated and correlated with actual historical events.²⁰

In sum, Marsden views the “Fundamentalist” definition of inerrancy as emphasizing the precision of biblical statements regarding history and science. And, like Vawter, he notes elements of “Enlightenment” thought that allegedly helped create the doctrine of inerrancy in its modern format—a format that is not completely commensurate with the earlier statements of the Christian churches that the Bible has no errors.

In contradistinction to the influential Augustinian tradition on

the subject, Marsden does not apparently believe that the doctrine of inerrancy has much to do with the issue of the Bible's authority. He downplays the doctrine on a consistent basis, often identifying it solely as a Fundamentalist belief.²¹ In defining who an Evangelical is, he declines to mention the doctrine; rather, he argues that the Evangelical is one who believes in "the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible."²² In reality, the Reformers were Augustinian and would have had little truck for Marsden's ambivalence towards an affirmation of inerrancy. Augustine wrote: "For it seems to me that the most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books."²³

Whereas for both Vawter and Marsden, the "Enlightenment" created the intellectual context for the shaping of the "Fundamentalist" doctrine of biblical inerrancy, Bernard Ramm notes the fact that biblical scholars in the Enlightenment recognized the humanity of the biblical texts and in their biblical criticism challenged an unhealthy emphasis of "orthodox" Christians upon its divinity.²⁴ Ramm invites Evangelicals to come to grips with certain elements of the Enlightenment's view of the Bible in forming their own perceptions of biblical authority. For him, Karl Barth serves as a remarkable resource person in this regard. According to Ramm, Barth made his peace with the Enlightenment without succumbing to its more negative criticisms of the Christian faith.²⁵ If Evangelicals will do the same, they will avoid "obscurantism."²⁶

The "Enlightenment," then, has emerged as a historical period of great significance for several recent interpreters of the history of biblical authority. For Professors Vawter and Marsden, it was during the Enlightenment that the modern "Fundamentalist" doctrine of biblical inerrancy began to be formulated; for Professor Ramm, it was during this period that scholars began to give due attention to the humanity of the Scriptures and to recognize its fallibility.

How valid are the claims of these distinguished scholars? Before we assess their claims, we should comment briefly about the difficulties associated with our authors' use of global expressions such as "scientific age and the age of rationalism" (Vawter), "modern style of thinking" (Marsden), and "Enlightenment" (Marsden, Ramm). These "paradigmatic" expressions are losing much force today as scholars grapple with the difficulties of defining what the "Enlightenment" may have represented.

II. THE ELUSIVE QUEST TO DEFINE THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Within the last several decades numerous scholars have become convinced that the eighteenth-century "Enlightenment" is a more

elusive quarry to trap with a net of general characterizations than they had previously believed. A careful analysis shows that there are various connotations associated with the traditional words that designate the Enlightenment in several languages. Quite simply, the expressions *Enlightenment*, *Siècle des lumières*, *Aufklärung*, *Iluminismo*, and *Ilustracion* are not exact synonyms.²⁷

This point is made more understandable when we recall that Frenchmen, Germans, Englishmen, and Swiss, for example, did not experience the so-called "Enlightenment" in quite the same ways, if they encountered any "Enlightenment" at all. Large numbers of Europeans, especially illiterate peasants and workers, remained quite untouched by the movement. They continued to live in an oral culture.²⁸ Moreover, the "time-frame" for these national "Enlightenments" did not always overlap. Despite the wide-ranging influence of Christian Wolff in the first half of the eighteenth century, the *Aufklärung* did not become especially prevalent in the Lutheran towns and cities of northern Germany until the second half of the eighteenth century.²⁹ Lutheran orthodoxy and conservative Pietism reigned supreme in the hearts of many German Protestants until mid-century.³⁰ On the contrary, the deistic controversy that stirred the caldron of public debate during the Enlightenment in Anglican England became especially acrid much earlier (in the wake of the publication of John Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity* in 1695).³¹ The more public phase of *Siècle des lumières* developed in Roman Catholic France in the decades following the publication of Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* in 1748.³² Before that date, "Enlightenment" literature often had passed from hand to hand in a more clandestine fashion. Fearing censorship and reprisal, "Enlightenment" authors like Voltaire and Montesquieu generally delivered glancing blows rather than direct verbal hits upon the "Old Order" before mid-century.³³

With their growing realization that the "Enlightenments" took on various shadings in different religious, social, and political environments, scholars have tried to sort out the commonalities and distinctives of national experiences during the Enlightenment. The 1978 edition of the review *Dix-huitième Siècle* contains articles in which capable scholars attempt to discern the essential traits of the "Enlightenment" in specific countries (e.g., the United Provinces, the Pays-Bas [French], Poland, Portugal).³⁴ Professors Hans Bots and Jan de Vet, for example, write about the uniqueness of reactions to the Enlightenment in the United Provinces:

The same *Lumières* which shone elsewhere during this period refracted in the United Provinces and divided into a spectrum of colors and of nuances which is not interchangeable with any of those which characterized the flourishing of the *Lumières* in the other countries. Much research will be yet

needed in order to appreciate the exact coloration of the *Lumières* in the United Provinces.³⁵

The authors were impressed by the staying power of the Christian faith during the eighteenth century.

Specialists in the history of the book trade also want to track how the books, bmad sheets, journals and other printed materials purveying “Enlightenment ideas” moved through the cosmopolitan Republic of Letters from one nation to another.³⁶ Are there chronological sequences to be charted? Is the year 1680, associated with Paul Hazard’s dating of the “Crisis of the European Mind” (1680-1715), the baseline from which any such tracking should begin? Or should another year be selected? Complicating these issues even further is another issue that Professor Aram Vartanian has brilliantly brought into focus. In reviewing benchmark studies by Professors Michel Vovelle, Daniel Roche, and Robert Darnton, Vartanian points out that Michel Vovelle discovered signs of “dechristianization” in the province of Provence decades before the writings of the *philosophes* Voltaire, Diderot, D’Alembert, La Mettrie, and others were widely disseminated:

What the graphs show, therefore, is that *Lumières* as a literary and philosophical enterprise, and dechristianization as a social process, were independent phenomena, though destined to converge in the Late Enlightenment. Put another way, when the spirit of the Enlightenment eventually reached the general public, the latter had already prepared itself, by a different route, to receive, and practice it.³⁷

Vartanian proposes that the crucial question on the agenda of present research for French historians is to explain what forces were bringing about the “dechristianization” processes that occurred in general isolation from the “literary-philosophic” movement associated with the French *philosophes*.³⁸

Here the research of Professor Dale Van Kley may be of signal importance.³⁹ He does not disparage the importance of interpretations that stress the influence of the *philosophes’* writings or the role of economic factors in giving shape to the *Siècle des lumières* in France. But he does suggest with sophisticated arguments and rich documentation that the “unraveling of the Old Order” has much to do with religious controversies between Jesuits and Jansenists that spilled over into the political domain especially during the refusal of sacraments dispute of the 1750s and the broils associated with the expulsion of the Jesuits in the 1760s.⁴⁰ These controversies contributed to the breaking down of the loyalties of many Frenchmen to the institutions of the *Ancien Régime*.

Van Kley’s studies once again bring to the fore the seriousness with which many eighteenth-century Europeans treated questions of religion. It will not do to speak of the Enlightenment as a period of

unmitigated “secularism” or indifferentism. Even Christianity’s most virulent foes (e.g., Voltaire) viewed the times as a mixed age of “lights” (the progress of *la philosophie*) and “darkness” (the superstition and fanaticism that he associated with the practitioners of the Christian religion).⁴¹

These brief comments should give us pause. Historians today are not at all certain that Immanuel Kant was speaking for a majority of Europeans when he penned his controversial definition of the age in the essay “Was ist Aufklärung?": “Enlightenment is man’s leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one’s intelligence without the guidance of another.”⁴² Professor Vartanian reminds us that the number of Frenchmen whose religious beliefs were molded by the writings of the *philosophes* was quite small: “Clearly, those whose religious attitudes were formed through exposure to the philosophes should be counted as an integral part of the Enlightenment proper. They must have been no more than 50,000 individuals, and their class-reference was no doubt quite diversified. ...”⁴³

Recent studies are taking far more note of the persistence of the Christian faith in the eighteenth century. Even Baron d’Holbach’s famous coterie at Paris was not the hotbed of atheism that a longstanding historiography had announced with assurance.⁴⁴ Contemporaries often viewed the Seven Years War (1756-1763) as a war of religion pitting Roman Catholic against Protestant powers.

No longer is it possible to identify the age solely with Voltaire or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, both of whom died in 1778. Nor can we rely upon paradigmatic expressions such as the “scientific age and age of reason” (Vawter) without specifying exactly what we mean. The diversity of intellectual opinion and religious convictions in the period does not lend itself to overly bold categorizations of this type. In bolstering an argument, contemporaries frequently appealed to “everyday experience” as much as they did to reason.⁴⁵ John Wesley and George Whitefield lived their lives in the eighteenth century as vigorously as did Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In 1984, Professor Vartanian suggested that new research is forcing us to reconsider dramatically what the nature of the “Enlightenment” may have been.⁴⁶

III. CHRISTIANS AND THE BIBLE IN THE “ENLIGHTENMENT”

Despite the surprising vitality of the Christian faith in the eighteenth century, there is little doubt that various forms of the Christian religion and the Bible’s authority were severely buffeted during the “Enlightenment” (using the conventional term and dating

its onset with a conventional date, 1680). Studies by Professors Michel Vovelle, Margaret Jacob, C. J. Betts, John Redwood, and Marie-Hélène Coioni make this clear.⁴⁷ Critics did force Christians to ponder the best strategies with which to defend their faith; and many Christians did make one adaptation or another to teachings associated with the "Enlightenment." In fact, several leading pastors of the outlawed Church of the Desert in southern France became partisans of "philosophic ideas"-particularly after Voltaire's intervention in the Calas Affair between 1762 and 1765.⁴⁸

But did Christians in general develop a "Fundamentalist" doctrine of biblical inerrancy in their interaction with the "Enlightenment"? Did they emphasize the precision and the truthfulness of Scripture and extend its infallibility to areas of history and science and thereby depart from a more "accommodating" view of earlier Christians? Have Professors Vawter and Marsden, esteemed and insightful thinkers both, deciphered a subtle but important doctrinal innovation? And is Professor Ramm correct to surmise that Neologian theologians in the "Enlightenment" made advances on the "Orthodox" in their understanding of the "humanity" of the Scriptures? These more restricted questions will direct the remainder of the present study.

IV. THE BIBLE'S TRUTHFULNESS AND "HISTORY"

To answer these questions, we must bear in mind what earlier Christians had believed about the Bible's infallibility in preceding centuries. Their beliefs will afford us with a foil against which suspected innovations by "Enlightenment" Christians might be measured. Moreover, we need to reconsider the interplay between post-Tridentine Roman Catholic and Protestant polemics regarding the Bible. In a remarkable way these polemics often set the stage for discussions about the Bible's authority in the "Enlightenment."

Following the Council of Trent (1545-63), Roman Catholic apologists often exploited arguments of the "new pyrrhonism" (a resurgence of skeptical argumentation in the second half of the sixteenth century) by indicating that even though Protestants and Roman Catholics concurred that the Bible was infallible, Protestants were doomed to fall into skepticism.⁴⁹ Protestants did not have an infallible interpreter to tell them what the Bible meant: thus, they would splinter into many sectarian groups, each following the personal fancies of ambitious headstrong leaders. For their part, Roman Catholics believed that they alone benefitted from possessing the "authentic" text of the Bible, the Vulgate; they alone enjoyed the direction of an infallible magisterium and infallible traditions that could instruct them regarding the meaning of their Bible. In fact, the Bible belonged to the church, the guardian of God's truth.

Protestants responded that the Roman Catholic analysis of the Protestants' inevitable slide into skepticism was patently wrong-headed. They said that the Holy Spirit, the ultimate author of Scripture, helps the reader of Scripture to understand its meaning; what better interpreter could a Christian have, far better than men (i.e., fallible priests, bishops, or a Pope)?⁵⁰ In response to Roman Catholic goading about the Holy Spirit's guidance in interpretation, Protestants also emphasized the role of regenerated reason in assisting the believer to understand Scripture. Moreover, they averred that Scripture interpreted Scripture, clearer passages enlightening darker ones. The Scriptures are sufficient and perspicuous concerning matters of essential faith and practice. There is no need to turn to fallible Roman Catholic traditions for additional information regarding those subjects.⁵¹

Skillful Roman Catholic apologists like Bellarmine, François Venn, François de Sales, and Jean Morin at the end of the sixteenth century and during the first decades of the seventeenth century did not acquiesce before the logic of the Protestants' apologetic. The Oratorian Jean Morin highlighted textual difficulties of the Scriptures in an attempt to demonstrate that the Bible was not as perspicuous as Protestants claimed.⁵² François de Sales pointed out with biting irony that Protestants had divided into many groups despite the guidance of the Holy Spirit (de Sales arguing that the Holy Spirit works in conjunction with the Roman Catholic Church).⁵³ François Venn, the celebrated debater, tied up a number of Reformed disputants in knots by pointing out that although Protestants said they believed in *sola Scriptura*, they actually relied upon another authority (their own reason) in interpreting Scripture.⁵⁴ The Jesuits Genebrard and Guillaume Baile scored those Protestants who tried to uphold the certitude of the Old Testament by affirming the inspiration of the Masoretic pointing.⁵⁵

Protestants were not reluctant to turn around the canons of pyrrhonical argumentation and to fire back with similar fusillades of "skeptical" flack. If the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church is infallible in its interpretive role, why are there various groups within Catholicism itself? Does not the Jesuit and Jansenist controversy over the merits of Augustinianism demonstrate the weakness of the Roman Catholic argument?⁵⁶ Do not Roman Catholic traditions conflict with each other on many points?⁵⁷ Do Roman Catholics really believe that their beliefs about the Eucharist are "perpetual" as the Jansenists Arnauld and Nicole insisted in their debate with the Reformed pastor Jean Claude in the 1660s and 1670s?⁵⁸ And where in Scripture can one find passages to sustain the authority of the bishop of Rome as the head of Christ's church, let alone as the infallible interpreter of Christian doctrine? Does not the Bible teach that it is authoritative because God is its ultimate author, not because the church has

deemed it to be so? Could not the uncertainty of Roman Catholic teachings lead to, of all things, skepticism?

In the second half of the seventeenth century the Roman Catholic and Protestant debate over these matters, conjoined with the impact of Cartesian thought and developments in science, elevated the issue of certitude to a very prominent place in the thinking of many philosophers and theologians. If pitched apologetic battles (as well as the tragic Wars of Religion) between the opposing churches had not revealed that God favored one party or another, then several contemporaries wondered if Christians could muster any rational argument to persuade their foes to change confessions.

For several thinkers, apologetical arguments between Christians (including Easterners), whether biblical or historical, had run their course. Pierre Bayle, for one, proposed that they had. He proposed that the truthfulness of religious beliefs cannot be determined by rational arguments-witness the longstanding confessional conflicts. Religious beliefs are essentially determined by faith commitments.

For many Christian apologists, however, the need to demonstrate the “rational” character of the Christian faith itself was becoming all the more imperative.⁵⁹ In hard-hitting invective and clever sideswiping rhetoric, deists were claiming that “natural religion” constituted a more rational belief than the Christian faith and that “Reason’s” rights to judge revelation had been well established. In fact, “Revelation” was not necessary. In the *Moral Philosopher*, the deist Thomas Morgan responded to John Leland’s defense of biblical infallibility in this way:

And does he not see what an Advantage he has hereby given the Atheists and real Infidels? For in this Case, if they can give any plain Instances, or Proofs, of Errors, Mistakes, or Inconsistencies, in the sacred Writers, it will be enough to set aside their Inspiration and immediate divine Authority; for if they were not infallible in one Case, they might not in another; and if they were not immediately inspired in historical matters, who can prove that they were in Doctrinals? And such are the wretched Shifts to which all these must be driven, who place Infallibility and Certainty in any thing else but the necessary immutable Truth, Reason, and Fitness of Things. I think nothing can be plainer than this, that there is no such thing as *historical Infallibility*, but that all Men are liable to Error, not only in remote Facts and supernatural Events, but even with regard to the most common Affairs, and things near at hand.⁶⁰

From Morgan’s point of view, a belief in biblical infallibility abets the cause of “atheists” because they can exploit its actual errancy. Individuals should turn towards Reason as a final authority. Challenges of this kind often prompted “Enlightenment” Christians to construct their apologies in the various ways that they did. Professor Hugh D. McDonald’s thoughtful assessment of the value of their apologetic choices stands as a heuristic counterevaluation to Professor Vawter’s harsh judgments.⁶¹

In the last decades of the seventeenth century, daunting quests to determine criteria upon which religious belief could be established and to draw up a list of essential doctrines upon which Christians of all communions could agree captured the attention of such disparate thinkers as John Locke and William Stillingfleet in England and Gottfried Leibniz in Germany.⁶² But the issues had become far more complex because critics were now questioning the infallibility of the Bible, thereby challenging it as a source of utterly truthful information and right doctrine.

In earlier centuries, Christians had simply assumed that the Bible was infallible, as Professor Burtchaell noted. This explains why several Roman Catholic scholars were dismayed when Erasmus not only seemed to dispute the infallibility of the Vulgate through his lower criticism but went a step further by suggesting that the original authors of the Scriptures could have made errors. John Eck counseled Erasmus about his disquieting comments on Matthew 2:6:

Listen, dear Erasmus: do you suppose any Christian will patiently endure to be told that the evangelists in their Gospels made mistakes? If the authority of Holy Scripture at this point is shaky, can any other passage be free from the suspicion of error?⁶³

Eck did not believe that “any Christian” would listen to the claim of the sage of Rotterdam with equanimity. Moreover, he cited Saint Augustine to the effect that if a genuine error existed in Holy Scripture, that fact alone would throw the authority of Scripture into jeopardy.⁶⁴ Perhaps due to negative reactions, Erasmus did ultimately revise his interpretation of Matthew 2:6. In the early sixteenth century, when the Reformers put quill to paper, few dared challenge the infallibility of Holy Writ.

However, by the second half of the seventeenth century, not only had a number of Socinians, Libertines, Remonstrants, La Peyrère, Hobbes, and members of several radical groups insisted that the Bible contained a few errors in minor matters, but Roman Catholic writers like Henry Holden (1596-1662) and the biblical critic Richard Simon (1638-1712) began to question the Bible’s sufficiency to communicate revealed truth perfectly.⁶⁵ In his *Divinae fidei analysis* (first edition, 1652; 1655; 1685; 1767), Holden, using a “rational” method (whose inspiration was probably Cartesian), attempted to separate out what was “certain” from what was “doubtful” in Christianity.⁶⁶ Holden was perhaps the first major Roman Catholic thinker to limit inerrancy to matters of faith and practice.⁶⁷ In his *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678), the Oratorian Richard Simon apparently denied that Moses wrote all the Pentateuch.⁶⁸ Although Simon claimed that his controversial “public scribes” hypothesis actually responded to Baruch Spinoza’s earlier criticisms against biblical infallibility and the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch in the latter’s *Tractatus*

Theologico-Politicus (1670), a good number of contemporaries like Bossuet wondered if Simon could be a Spinozist in priest's garb.⁶⁹

Modern scholars are so accustomed to theological pluralism that they often have difficulty grasping the fact that before 1680 most Christians believed that to challenge the Mosaic authorship of the Bible or the doctrine of biblical infallibility was tantamount to challenging the truth claims of the Christian religion. Little wonder, then, that Spinoza's *Tractatus-which* also contested the value of miracles and prophecy as validating pillars of Christian truth claims-transformed its author into a theological pariah in the eyes of the orthodox. Even Pierre Bayle described the book as "pernicious and detestable."⁷⁰ Little wonder that Simon was excluded from the Oratorian order in 1678 and that the first edition of the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* was confiscated and burned. Only a few volumes of this edition escaped the flames.⁷¹

But we should recall, as Professor Jacques Le Brun astutely observes, Holden and Simon belonged to a long line of Roman Catholic contmversialists (Erasmus, François de Sales, Charron, Camus, Valeriano Magni, and others) who, in their attempts to exalt the authority of the church, emphasized the insufficiency of Scripture.⁷² The alleged insufficiencies and weakness of Scripture "were apologetical arguments before they became the conclusions of criticism."⁷³ Simon, then, who has been 'hailed as the "Father of Biblical Criticism" (as has Spinoza), still worked ostensibly with the agenda of a traditional Roman Catholic disputant, but his hypotheses and conclusions ranged far beyond those of earlier more conservative apologists.⁷⁴

The irony of the Roman Catholic "pyrrhonical," or skeptical, argumentation is that deists frequently exploited its arsenal not only in their attacks against the Protestants' perspectives on Scripture but against the Christian faith in general. For example, the free-thinkers John Toland and Anthony Collins cited the arguments of Simon to demonstrate that the Bible contained "errors."⁷⁵ The deist Matthew Tindal, in a tour de force, proceeded to argue that if the Scriptures are errant, God cannot hold us accountable to them. To what standard can God in justice hold us accountable if the teachings of the Bible and the churches are uncertain? Tindal's answer was plain: Reason. If we follow the light of our reason as best we can, God cannot help but judge us positively. We did the best we could with the light we had.⁷⁶

Astute contemporaries perceived that deists were borrowing Roman Catholic pyrrhonical arguments. William Bentley, a shrewd critic of Anthony Collins, pinpointed this borrowing clearly. Collins had portrayed several Roman Catholic scholars (including Simon) as intent upon demonstrating the corruption of the texts of Scripture in order to force Protestants to accept the authority of the church.⁷⁷ To this Bentley responded:

One confesses that the painstaking research of Father Simon had no other goal than to sap the foundations of the Reformed Religion and that this savant Roman Catholic thought nothing better for his own goals than to render Holy Scripture precarious. This ruse is thus a knavish ecclesiastical trick à la Roman; and how can it be, if you please, that a man [Collins] who professes to declare war on all Priests, and all knavish ecclesiastical tricks, feels so at home with a Roman Catholic priest, and supports him with so much warmth in the pious intention of maintaining the cause of Popes?⁷⁸

Bentley also fended off Collins' claim that the Christian faith is uncertain because we no longer have the original documents of the Scriptures. Roman Catholics like Simon had earlier argued in a similar fashion, except the Oratorian had riposted that recourse to Roman Catholic traditions reestablished the certainty. Bentley was particularly galled because Collins had cited his own philological work to bolster the hypothesis. Collins had reasoned this way: if as the Cambridge scholar Bentley had argued, some thirty thousand variants exist in the New Testament alone, how can one know with assurance anything about what the Bible teaches?⁷⁹

Bentley responded to Collins with a gloves-off counterstroke. He wisely remarked that the discovery of many manuscripts since the fifteenth century had provided biblical scholars with greater means for emending obvious faulty readings in the Greek texts than when they had fewer manuscripts.⁸⁰ In turning the tables on the freethinker Collins, Bentley was not striking a new pose among Christians. Richard Baxter had argued much the same way earlier in the seventeenth century.⁸¹ Bentley's contemporary, Jacques Basnage, a French Protestant, argued at length against the Roman Catholic apologetic that tried to exploit the "lost originals" idea.⁸² Basnage believed that the originals had been lost by Tertullian's day but that accurate copies nonetheless had been preserved. Protestants did not need to resort to Roman Catholic tradition to counterbalance the nefarious effects of the loss of the "originals."⁸³ For that matter, Augustine had recommended that students correct the mistakes in their copies of Holy Scripture.⁸⁴

The emphasis by many Protestants in the eighteenth century upon the accuracy of the Bible's historical accounts and teachings regarding the natural world becomes more understandable when we perceive how deists-and to certain extent Roman Catholics-had exploited the issue. Moreover, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, various illuminist groups such as the French *Inspirés* seemed to deemphasize Scripture by their appeal to personal prophetic utterances.⁸⁵ But eighteenth-century Protestants who believed that the Bible was without error in historical detail were not innovators; they were defending a position long honored in the Christian churches.

Even a cursory reading of commentaries from earlier centuries

reveals that Christians, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, believed that the Bible gave truthful information in its historical allusions and comments about the natural world. Professor John Redwood describes the commitments of seventeenth-century Christians: "To the seventeenth-century biblical chronology, the account of Moses, and the science of geology were all part of the same world of learning. No one seeking to enquire into rocks or minerals, into earth history or the formation of the earth's configuration could afford to ignore or deny the value of his primary source, the Bible."⁸⁶ James Ussher in the early seventeenth century had based his dating of creation at 4004 B.C. on a detailed and literal reading of the historical accounts (whether we judge his interpretation right or wrong). Many seventeenth-century histories of the world began with recitations about Adam and Eve and assigned a specific date for creation and other events spoken of in the Scriptures. Johann Heinrich Alsted, Joseph Mede, James Ussher, and others propounded prophetic schemes that assumed that the historical accounts in Scripture were very accurate indeed.⁸⁷ In the early seventeenth century, exegetes went to great length to defend the accuracy of the Bible's description of the flood.⁸⁸ Moreover, in the sixteenth century, a Reformer like Martin Bucer assumed that the historical accounts of the Scriptures were utterly reliable.⁸⁹ It will not do to suggest that a concern for the historical infallibility of the "facts" of the biblical text first emerged in the "Enlightenment" due to the impact of "Baconianism," Common Sense Realism, Newtonian science, or some other factor. The free-thinker Morgan perceived the "historical infallibility" of the Bible as a common belief to overthrow, not one that was just coming into existence.

In the last two decades of the seventeenth century, the task of "orthodox" Protestants was further complicated by the emergence of an openness to errancy among fellow Protestants, especially in Remonstrant circles in the United Provinces and in Latitudinarian circles in England. For example, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645)—the jurist, political theoretician, and biblical scholar—had, early in the seventeenth century, advocated a doctrine of accommodation, which was in turn taught at the Remonstrant Seminary at Amsterdam by Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736).⁹⁰ According to this Socinian teaching, God accommodated portions of the Bible to the understanding of the contemporaries of the biblical authors. Small errors occur in those passages where the Bible's human authors incorporate contemporary opinions about history and the natural world, even if these opinions were not "truthful."⁹¹ This doctrine of accommodation regarding the Bible differed substantially from the doctrine of accommodation proposed by Saint Augustine and John Calvin.⁹² According to their perspective, God did accommodate the Scriptures to the understanding of us humans, but He did so without allowing the text of Scripture to be alloyed with errors.

When the Roman Catholic Richard Simon and the Protestant Jean Le Clerc did battle royal in a four-volume match between 1685 and 1687, careful scorekeepers and they were many in the Republic of Letters-noticed a peculiar twist.⁹³ Theoretically, each combatant represented a different confession. But Le Clerc's emphasis upon reason, an errant text, and criticism for traditional views of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch did not seem too far removed from Simon's praise for a "criticism" of the text unhampered by a concern for theological presuppositions (despite his claim to defend Roman Catholic tradition) and Simon's own peculiar views of Mosaic authorship. In an earlier unpublished manuscript, Simon had defined a critic as a person who is "judicious," free from prejudice, impartial, and "a good man who loves truth."⁹⁴ Le Clerc probably would have concurred with this definition.

In sum, when orthodox defenders of the Bible's truthfulness wrote in the eighteenth century, they faced challenges from various quarters. Deists and Socinians highlighted the rights of reason to judge revelation; rationalistic Remonstrants like Le Clerc argued that an errant text had no negative entailments for the truthfulness of the gospel; even conservative Roman Catholics highlighted textual difficulties in the Scriptures as they continued to wage pyrrhonal warfare against Protestants; Protestant and Roman Catholic illuminist writers often separated Word from Spirit; and Spinoza criticized the Bible's authority from the vantage points of "morality" and a Cartesian emphasis upon reason.⁹⁵ The ranks of those who opposed biblical infallibility were swelling in number. The need to emphasize the truthfulness of the historical accounts in the Bible had become all the more urgent. Hostile critics like Spinoza, Toland, Collins, and others were, from their claim that the Bible was errant, drawing devastating conclusions about the Christian religion. Those Christians who accented the veracity of the historical accounts did not help create the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, but they may have emphasized this veracity more than earlier Christians, given the worrisome apologetical exigencies of the day.

V. THE BIBLE AND "NATURAL PHILOSOPHY"

If many Christian apologists were not innovative in affirming that the Bible was accurate in its historical detail, did they become so when they were writing about the relationship between Scripture and natural philosophy? Or, to put the matter another way, did certain eighteenth-century defenders of the Bible's authority extend the purview of the infallibility of Scripture to the natural world and treat Holy Writ as if it were a "scientific textbook" (as Marsden maintains)?

Undoubtedly, those writers who penned physico-theological tractates did, for apologetic purposes, emphasize passages in Scripture that speak of the natural world.⁹⁶ Countering those who seemed to remove God from an active role in nature by emphasizing secondary causes, they wanted to demonstrate that God was the “First Cause.” These apologists attempted to demonstrate how the design of animals and insects reflected the handiwork of the great Designer, God Himself.

But to see the Bible as an accurate source of information about the natural world was certainly no novel gambit of Christians living during the “Enlightenment.” A reading of Lambert Daneau’s *The Wonderful Workmanship of the World: wherein .is contained an excellent discourse of Christian naturall Philosophie, concerning the fourme, knowledge, and use of all thinges created ...* (published in London, in 1578 [English edition of that text]) quickly dispels that hypothesis.⁹⁷ Citing Augustine, Chrysostom, and other church fathers, Daneau argued that general natural philosophy “is chiefly to bee learned out of holy Scripture.”⁹⁸ Daneau did not deliver this argument in a rationalistic framework, as several neoorthodox writers like Ernst Bizer would have us believe.⁹⁹ Daneau argued that various church fathers maintained that general natural philosophy should be based on Scripture, and that Scripture itself commended the idea. Moreover, he specifically downplayed reason and the senses as adequate grounding for the natural sciences: “But whatsoever other things are recited touching Naturall Philosophie, they are not so sure and firme, because they bee only established by man’s sense, and reason: which two things are no undoubted, and assured groundes. For man’s reason is many times: and his senses are most times deceived.”¹⁰⁰ According to Daneau, natural philosophy should be founded on the sure Word of God, and there were historical precedents, biblical admonitions, and reasons of faith for asserting this.

Many of Daneau’s contemporaries also read their Bible for information about the natural world-as if it were a “scientific textbook.” In his *Therobiblia Biblisch Thier-Vogel-und Fischbuch* (Leipzig, 1595), Hermann Heinrich Frey based his understanding of birds, fish, and animals upon his reading of Scripture.¹⁰¹ Then again, as the astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) complained, “The whole world is full of men who are ready to thmw all of astronomy, if it sides with Copernicus, off the earth.”¹⁰² Kepler understood only too well that large numbers of his contemporaries believed that the Bible’s teachings militated against the acceptance of a heliocentric theory of the universe. Even if heterodox, Jean Bodin, the sixteenth-century man of letters, cited Melanchthon’s reference to a verse of Scripture as the basis of his own rejection of the Copernican perspective.¹⁰³ For many sixteenth-century Christians, their interpre-

tations of biblical passages had far more persuasive force than the mathematical calculations mustered by partisans of Copernicus.

Kepler, a Lutheran and mystic of sorts, also wanted to uphold the complete infallibility of the Bible. But he believed that he understood the accommodated language of the Bible better than did his detractors, who were frequently anti-Copernicans due to their reading of the Bible. In fact, Professor Edward Rosen remarks that “Lutheran theologians in Kepler’s time looked upon the Bible as a textbook of astronomy.”¹⁰⁴ Kepler’s own description of the problem is telling: “Piety prevents many people from agreeing with Copernicus out of fear that the Holy Ghost speaking in Scripture will be branded as a liar if we say that the earth moves and the sun stands still.”¹⁰⁵

For his part Kepler argued somewhat like Calvin and Augustine that certain passages of Scripture were written from a “phenomenological” point of view (based on the vantage point of what a common person would see). But he did not read all of the Scripture’s statements about the natural world as those of a language of appearance. Nor did Calvin or Augustine. Moreover, the Bible is not errant in those portions that encompass this type of language. These sections are “truthful” as are other portions of Scripture. We do not find in Kepler’s thought the premise of Professor Vawter (that accommodated language has the necessary corollary of an errant text). On the contrary, in chapter one of his *Mysterium Cosmographicum*, Kepler declared: “In general I promise to say nothing harmful to Holy Writ, and if Copernicus is convicted of anything with me, I shall consider him finished.”¹⁰⁶ Unless he was writing in bad faith, Kepler formally announced that he would forsake Copernicus if any of the latter’s hypotheses about the natural world were demonstrated to be contrary to the truthful Holy Scripture.

In Kepler’s writings, natural philosophy had not yet been uncoupled from biblical authority as it would later become in the seventeenth century for some scholars. Debates regarding the pre-Adamite hypotheses of Isaac La Peyrère, for example, lay in the future.¹⁰⁷ Kepler still was concerned that his theories meshed with what, in passing, the Bible taught about the natural world. And obviously, his more literalistically inclined Lutheran opponents believed that the Bible’s infallibility encompassed both history and teachings about that world.

Earlier on, Luther apparently rejected the Copernican perspective because it contradicted his interpretation of biblical passages and contemporary Aristotelian science. He commissioned the artist Lucas Cranach to do woodcuts that would illustrate the text of what became known as the Luther-Bibel of 1534.¹⁰⁸ The drawing illustrating the first chapters of Genesis reveals a geocentric cosmology. The dominant figure of God overlooks creation. A small sun along with other planets circles the much larger earth. Adam and Eve speak to each other

while the animals stand in the foreground.¹⁰⁹ Lucas Cranach and undoubtedly Luther himself practiced a literalistic reading of the text in Genesis. There is little doubt that they believed the Bible provided authoritative and accurate teaching about the configuration of the natural world and its creation.

“New” data are now available to stir the simmering pot of controversy regarding Calvin’s attitude towards Copernicus. For years, scholars had repeated the refrain that Calvin did not take a stand on the debate over the heliocentric hypothesis. Now we know that such is simply not the case. Citing Professor Richard Stauffer’s research on Calvin’s sermons, Professor Michel Heyd observes: “In a sermon on *I Corinthians X, 22*, Calvin dismissed people who held heliocentric ideas as being completely frenzied, comparing them to the Nicodemites who confounded good and evil and perverted the order of nature.”¹⁰ The exact reasons why he made this judgment will certainly be debated. The thesis that his reading of Scripture partially contributed to this stance should not be dismissed in a cavalier fashion, however.

The recent interpretation of Professor Roland M. Frye to the effect that Calvin viewed the Bible as a religious book with little or no prescriptive teaching about the natural world is highly problematic.¹¹¹ Frye does not cite Calvin’s judgment about heliocentric ideas. Nor does he present Calvin’s doctrine of accommodation in an especially accurate way. Calvin did not believe that the Bible is a “textbook” in astronomy, but this does not mean that Calvin completely excluded the natural world from the scope of the Bible’s authority.

This latter extrapolation made by Professor Frye probably reflects his own desire to enlist Calvin as a thinker who would have been open to “evolution” if Darwin’s hypotheses had been available to him.¹¹² According to this construction, Calvin would have had no biblical grounds to reject macmevolution; the Bible simply does not address issues related to the natural world in an authoritative way. In reality, Calvin was not any kind of evolutionist, theistic or otherwise. As Professor Henri Blocher observes, several studies have convincingly countermanded this characterization, one that B. B. Warfield apparently entertained: “B. B. Warfield had a very open attitude and thought that Calvin ‘teaches a doctrine of evolution’ because the creatures proceed from the confused mass of Genesis 1:2; that in fact was not what Calvin meant, as John Murray has shown and as R. Stauffer confirmed.”¹¹³ Those scholars who have argued this way have misunderstood Calvin’s doctrine of creation based upon a careful exegesis of the biblical text.¹⁴

Copernicus suspected that one source of potential opposition to his *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Orbs* (published posthumously in 1543) might come from Christians who perceived it as a challenge

to the authority of Holy Writ. They would identify their interpretation of Scripture with what the Bible taught.’¹⁵ Thus, to challenge their interpretations was the same as challenging the Bible’s authority. The astronomer’s premonitions were prescient. Many Protestants and Roman Catholics believed that the Bible gave infallible and, if you will, “precise” information about the natural world.¹¹⁶

To argue that it was not until the Enlightenment that such a way of thinking emerged regarding Holy Scripture does not appear warranted. Contrary to the interpretations found in the studies by Professor Vawter, Professors Rogers and McKim, and Professor Roland Frye, the choice that Christians faced until the middle of the seventeenth century was generally this: should each passage of an infallible Bible that speaks of the natural world be interpreted literally, or should some interpretative allowance be made for the fact that a number of passages are couched in the language of appearance (the vantage point of the observer)?¹¹⁷ The choice was generally not between belief in a completely infallible Bible and a “religious salvation book” whose infallibility was limited exclusively to matters of faith and practice. While differing in their interpretations of passages that dealt with the natural world, parties from both sides of this debate included “science” and history within their definition of infallibility. Those individuals who followed the Augustinian premise that certain portions of Scripture were written in phenomenological language, or proposed that the Bible treats the natural world only in passing, often found themselves criticized by other Christians who were more “literalistic” in their interpretations.¹¹⁸

In the second half of the seventeenth century, however, the writings by La Peyrère, Hobbes, and others led a few Christian scholars to claim that Scripture might contain “errors” regarding the natural world.¹¹⁹ It followed that scientists who accepted this premise no longer strongly felt an imperative to align their findings with biblical teachings.¹²⁰ Moreover, several scientists, drawing upon the thought of Galileo and Bacon and others, argued that their investigations about the “real world” should be given more authority than the “phenomenological” statements of the Bible about the natural world.¹²¹ After all, the Scriptures only deal with the natural world in passing. In a word, the Scriptures should conform with what science teaches and not vice versa.

This recommendation called for an innovative reversal of roles in the framework of a new kind of concordism. Many earlier Christians had attempted to align their “science” with Holy Writ, Scripture possessing the primary authority. For example, in 1634, the Englishman John Weems offered a common understanding of the relationship that existed between “Sciences” and theology: “The conclusion of this is: All Sciences are found out for the benefit of man, but all of them can do him but little good, untill Divinity come in and rectifie

him. All Sciences are subordinate to Divinity in respect to the end; therefore every man should study to be holy, what science soever he professe.¹²² A brief vignette rehearsing the establishment of the prestigious University of Leiden testifies to the high status that the Bible had as a source of knowledge for many sixteenth-century Christians:

On the morning of the 8th of February 1574 a solemn procession wound through the streets of Leiden, to mark the dedication of the newly established University. Part of the tableau consisted of symbolic female figures, representing the four faculties; *Sancta Scriptura*, *Justitia*, *Medicina*, and *Minerva*. The last three figures were on horseback, but *Scriptura*, who led the way, was seated in the splendid triumphal chariot drawn by four horses. In her hand she held an open Bible. Next to her car of victory walked the four Evangelists.¹²³

This recitation by H. J. De Jonge, a modern scholar, captures well the preeminent authority of Holy Scripture for the Protestants celebrating the founding of the University of Leiden, an institution that was to exert wide influence in Protestant Europe. According to these Protestants, the Bible was not to be subservient to any discipline. It judged them all, as it did for the Lutheran theologians who rejected the heliocentric theory due to their reading of Holy Scripture.¹²⁴

That the Bible should enjoy such a privileged position in late sixteenth-century thought was no novelty. Many Roman Catholics had esteemed it in a similar fashion centuries before the birth of Martin Luther. During the Middle Ages, the Bible enjoyed a place of honor as a divinely authoritative source of knowledge. Manuscript collections were often organized under three rubrics: (1) manuscripts of the Holy Scripture standing supremely by themselves, (2) manuscripts that helped readers understand Holy Scripture, and (3) diverse manuscripts.¹²⁵

A number of medieval scholars like John Wycliffe apparently believed that the Bible was a divine encyclopedia of all knowledge.¹²⁶ Other scholars did not support this idea but incorporated the Bible's teaching into their cosmologies and world views. Professor N. Max Wildiers, who introduced the writings of Teilhard de Chardin to a large public, describes their perspective in this fashion:

The main question with which they were preoccupied and to which they devoted numerous writings, was precisely how a harmonious fusion of biblical data and Greek science could lead to a completely satisfactory and irrefutable picture of the universe. Countless texts were devoted to this venture.¹²⁷

Many medieval scholars used three basic sources in constructing their views of the cosmos, as Wildiers observes: "1. the scientific

conceptions of the ancient Greeks, supplemented by the works of Jewish and Arabian scholars; 2. the data of sacred Scriptures; 3. the teaching of the Church Fathers."¹²⁸ They assumed that the Scriptures were an "infallible" authority with truthful and binding teachings about the natural world.¹²⁹

These illustrations should be sufficient to demonstrate that "Enlightenment" Christians engaged in no new exegetical move when they viewed those details of the Bible that speak of the natural world as authoritative and corresponding with what is the case. Undoubtedly, a number of writers did not take notice of the Augustinian insight regarding the accommodated character of some of the biblical passages regarding the external world. But even these commentators had precursors in the history of the Christian churches, who treated the Bible as if it were a "scientific textbook."

Nor will it do to suppose that "Enlightenment" Christians adopted from Newton a "precisionistic Newtonian" view of the Bible and thereafter developed a doctrine of inerrancy. For one thing, Newton apparently advocated an Augustinian version of accommodation and had the "give" of that approach in his exegesis.¹³⁰ He argued that Moses adapted his comments about creation to what common people would have seen if they had been there.¹³¹ But in speaking in this accommodated fashion, Moses always told the truth:

As to Moses, I do not think his description of ye creation either Philosophical or feigned, but that he described realities in a language artificially adapted to ye sense of ye vulgar. Thus when he speaks of two great lights I suppose he means their apparent, not real greatness.¹³²

In Newton's discourse we hear echoes of Augustine's and Calvin's commentary on Genesis 1:16. With these two theologians, Newton asserted that Moses could have spoken with greater detail but chose not to do so because he knew the needs of his audience?³³ Newton's perspectives do not represent a doctrine of accommodation that entails errors in the biblical text; nor do they entail high levels of precision. The thesis that biblical inerrancy emerged when Enlightenment Christians forced Scripture's language to "conform to Newtonian notions of perfection" and Scripture's message to "accord with Lockean reason" (Rogers and McKim) stands in need of serious revision.³⁴ Newton did not establish a "precisionistic" standard by which to measure the Bible's truthfulness.

Newton's admirers may have done that, however. But even here the burden of proof remains on modern scholars like Professors Vawter and Marsden to clarify with care how their alleged "precisionistic" exegesis, for example, differed from the "literalistic" exegesis of many sixteenth-century Christians who opposed the Copernican hypothesis. To what extent did it differ from the harmonization efforts of Saint Augustine, who on occasion was concerned to explain how

one word of Scripture should be understood, so intent was he to guard the infallibility of Holy Writ?¹³⁵ And why did eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Christians wrestle with some of the same “Bible difficulties” as Calvin and Augustine did, if they were locked in an intellectual paradigm that was incommensurable with the “paradigms” of Calvin and Augustine?¹³⁶

Nor should we accept Professor Vawter’s interpretation that a doctrine of condescension satisfactorily explains the difference between these “precisionistic” moderns and the Reformers and Augustine. For Professor Vawter incorrectly assumes that the doctrine of accommodation accepted by Augustine and the Reformers dictated that errors be found in the text of Scripture. He bases this judgment on a misconstrued syllogism he applies in his discussion of accommodation: The Bible has human authors; to err is human; the Bible possesses errors.¹³⁷ Regrettably, this is a misrepresentation of the frame of reference out of which Augustine and the Reformers formed their doctrines of accommodation.

Ironically, the “Fundamentalists” whom Professor Vawter caricatures undoubtedly represented views closer to the thinking of the Reformers and Augustine than those of Professor Vawter himself.¹³⁸ As noted earlier, Vawter’s hypothesis that the accommodated language of Scripture must contain errors is an interpretation totally alien to the thinking of the Reformers or Augustine.

More obviously in the “central tradition” of Christian thought about Scripture’s authority are the Evangelicals (e.g., British scholar James I. Packer) who defend not only the complete infallibility of Scripture but acknowledge an Augustinian definition of accommodation.¹³⁹ To dismiss their position as merely a parochial extension of the nineteenth-century Princetonians or of American Fundamentalism betrays a genuine unfamiliarity with the history of biblical authority.

VI. THE “ENLIGHTENMENT” AND THE HUMANITY OF THE BIBLICAL, TEXT

Professor Ramm’s positive evaluation about the contributions of Enlightenment scholars to our understanding of the nature of Scripture deserves further commentary. Only a few comments can be made here. We hope to treat this topic more fully elsewhere.

Professor Ramm is particularly impressed by the writings of German Neologians who emphasized the humanity of Scripture—that is, the impress of the Bible’s human writers upon its contents. He suggests that the writings of the Neologians were virtually ignored (except for specialists) in the Anglo-Saxon theological community in which he received his education.¹⁴⁰ Unquestionably, literature regard-

ing the Neologians is not plentiful in English, but scholarly volumes in German by Karl. Aner and others have been available for decades.⁴¹ Presently, the refined analyses of Professors Peter Reill and Hans Frei do afford an interested English reader with the basic tenets of these eighteenth-century writers.¹⁴²

Did the “orthodox” Christians stress the divinity of the Scriptures to such an extent that the Neologians were obliged to make a corrective and emphasize their humanity? This question should not be considered in the rather narrow optic that Professor Ramm presents to his readers. It is true that deep into the eighteenth century, many German Lutheran and Pietist writers upheld the complete infallibility of the Bible. But some went further and argued for the inspiration of the Masoretic pointing of the Hebrew text as well. Commenting upon the career of the Neologian biblical critic John David Michaelis, Eichom in his *Allgemeine Bibliothek* noted this widespread commitment to these positions earlier in that century:

A Bible with various readings had been printed at Halle, in the year 1720, and notwithstanding the use of the whole noble apparatus, they adhered still pertinaciously to the infallibility of the vulgar text. They had discovered, upon investigation, and exposed to view in this edition of the Bible, the contradictions of the Masora—the most satisfactory evidence of their fallibility; and yet they had sworn, in as solemn a manner, to the absolute infallibility of the same, as they had sworn to their symbolical articles.

Michaelis, on his first appearance as a public teacher, was full, to overflowing, of this faith of his fathers. In the year 1739, he decked out, after his fashion, in a dissertation “de punctorum hebraicorum antiquitate.” In the year 1740, he came forward in the disputation *de Psalmo xxii* as an advocate of the infallibility of the entire text.¹⁴³

Johann Jakob Rambach’s *Institutiones Hermeneuticae Sacrae* (1723), the principal book on hermeneutics used by Pietist theologians, affirmed not only the inerrancy of Scripture but also the inspiration of the Masoretic pointing of the Hebrew text. Due to its popularity, the volume passed through eight editions by 1764.¹⁴⁴ Thus, some orthodox and Pietist authors in Germany did probably overemphasize the divinity of Scripture and did not sufficiently take into account developments in textual criticism and the human authorship of Scripture.⁴⁵

In challenging the accent of the “orthodox” upon the Bible’s divinity, however, the Neologians bypassed the positions of Luther and Calvin to espouse theories that made the humanity of the biblical writers the basis for the errancy of Scripture. John Calvin understood perfectly well that the Scriptures bore the marks of their human authors.¹⁴⁶ His commentaries give abundant evidence of this awareness. But the Reformer did not infer from the “humanity” of the Scriptures that they must be errant. Martin Bucer and Martin Luther did not make this connection either.¹⁴⁷

But did not the Neologians see themselves as recovering the exegetical and theological insights of their Lutheran “predecessor” Martin Luther after the alleged dismal and dark days of Protestant Scholasticism? Have not recognized scholars like Professor Gottfried Homig argued that Johann Salomo Semler did have a rightful claim upon Luther as one who shared similar convictions about the text of Scripture?⁴⁸

Although Semler did evoke the name of Luther to give credence to his own ground-breaking studies, he also adduced the name of the Roman Catholic Richard Simon as the scholar (besides Erasmus) whose program of criticism he most appreciated.⁴⁹ In fact, Semler, like the learned John David Michaelis, claimed that Simon was the “founder” of historical criticism.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, Semler’s important doctrine of accommodation (which Homig cites as a key for understanding his doctrine of Scripture) resembles more closely the “Socinian” version of that doctrine than the one that Reformers espoused.¹⁵¹ The theologian from Halle upheld the time-bound character of some of the biblical writings and the fallibility of these same texts. This “Socinian” doctrine of accommodation that Semler probably borrowed from Jean Le Clerc became a vehicle by which higher criticism could enter more easily into theological debate during the last decade of the eighteenth century.¹⁵² Professor Hornig tells us that between 1763 and 1817 there appeared no fewer than thirty-one titles that focused on the question of accommodation.¹⁵³

Little wonder that Charles Hodge could criticize Semler and Van Hemert in 1825 and complain about this faulty version of the doctrine of accommodation: “Perhaps few causes have operated more extensively and effectually in promoting erroneous opinions than the problems of this doctrine [a false concept of accommodation].”¹⁵⁴ Hodge noted that those scholars who argued that the Bible’s accommodated language encompassed errors were then obliged to pick and choose which sections of Holy Writ were truthful and which were not. That is, their reason judged Scripture: “It is evident that this doctrine is only a modification of the theory, which determines the sense of SS., by deciding what is, or is not reasonable; and which has as effectually excluded the doctrines of the Deity of Christ, and his atonement from the SS., because they are deemed inconsistent with reason.”¹⁵⁵

The neoorthodox claim that an errant text and principles of higher-criticism find motage in the thought of Martin Luther is not warranted.¹⁵⁶ The assertions of the Neologians that they were the direct theological descendants of Luther are also unfounded. A gmwing number of scholars are beginning to realize this.

When Professor Ramm urges Evangelicals to come to grips with the “Enlightenment” (which he amorphously defines) and with the biblical studies of the Neologians, he is making a call that has serious

implications. He is actually advising them to consider departing from the central tradition of the Christian churches regarding the authority of scripture.

Professor Ramm should consider well what he is advocating to the Evangelical community. His cure for “obscurantism” is undoubtedly more costly than the supposed inconveniences of upholding the doctrine of biblical infallibility. For many Evangelicals, that latter stance represents what the Bible teaches about itself and reflects the central tradition of the Christian churches.¹⁵⁷ It is neither “scholastic” (Rogers and McKim), nor “orthodoxist,” nor “obscurantist” (Ramm). Rather, it is sound doctrine.

If some “orthodox” Christians spoke without proper qualifications about the Bible’s divinity, the Neologians fell into a more grievous error by subjecting God’s Word to their personal judgments regarding what was authentic Scripture and what was not. In practice, they sometimes argued that the humanity of the Bible (including its alleged contradictions) confirmed the validity of the Scriptures as an authentic collection of religious books bearing God’s moral message.¹⁵⁸ Many of their disciples drew out unhappy implications about the truthfulness of the Christian faith from the premises that the Neologian theologians and Gotthold Lessing had proffered.¹⁵⁹

We would be well advised to follow the lead of Luther and Calvin, who believed that the Bible was both a fully divine and fully human book that does not err. Moreover the Reformers upheld the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture without relying on a mechanical dictation theory.¹⁶⁰

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present essay does not constitute a survey of the history of biblical authority in the “Enlightenment.” That daunting topic is far more complex than many suppose; several scholars in Germany, for example, are presently engaged in a thorough reconsideration of developments in biblical criticism during the eighteenth century.¹⁶¹ Rather, this essay’s purpose has been more modest: to provide a preliminary assessment of the interpretations of several well-known authors who have claimed that modern beliefs in biblical inerrancy are essentially paradigmatically dependent upon “Enlightenment motifs.”

In 1981, Professor Jack Rogers wrote: “In the late seventeenth century, the concept of the Bible’s infallibility in religious matters was transmuted into a notion of Scripture’s inerrancy in matters of science and history.”¹⁶² That is, during the beginning decades of the “Enlightenment,” the doctrine of biblical inerrancy allegedly emerged.

Professors Bruce Vawter and George Marsden have attempted to portray biblical “inerrancy” as an innovative “Fundamentalist” doctrine forged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to these authors, this modern version of inerrancy is not equivalent to what earlier Christians believed when they said that the Bible is without error. Professor Bernard Ramm, on the other hand, believes that Neologian scholars in the Enlightenment made a breakthrough in theology by coming to grips with the humanity of the Scriptures. From his perspective, Evangelicals must accept several of the conclusions about the Bible that eighteenth-century scholars proposed. If Evangelicals do not make their peace with these findings, they they will continue to be “obscurantist.” For all of these writers, the “Enlightenment” represents a major watershed in the history of biblical authority.

We have argued that, on the contrary, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy—that the Bible speaks truthfully about all matters upon which it touches, including history and science—was not a creation of the “Enlightenment.” Contemporaries of the late seventeenth century viewed this belief as one that the Christian churches had always held. If they were critics of the belief, they tried to point out specific errors (especially in the Pentateuch [1670s] and then in the Gospels [1680s]) with which to overthrow the position.¹⁶³ Deists acknowledged that they were attacking a position long esteemed by Christians, not one just coming into existence. Jean Le Clerc indicated self-consciously that his own beliefs clashed with what Protestants generally believed about the Bible’s infallibility.¹⁶⁴ If contemporaries were defenders of the doctrine, they thought they were upholding a belief cherished since the early years of the Christian church.

It is misleading to argue that some Protestants and Roman Catholics in the “age of science and age of reason” were innovative because they made the Bible conform to higher standards of precision than had earlier Christians. Many Christians before the Enlightenment believed that the Bible afforded them with detailed histories and that the Bible was a “scientific textbook”; they could match nearly any eighteenth-century exegete’s interest in small details in the Scripture. Moreover, it is misleading to claim (as does Professor Vawter) that all modern defenders of biblical inerrancy know nothing about a doctrine of accommodation. Admittedly, some do not. But many heartily endorse an Augustinian doctrine of accommodation and at the same time affirm the truthfulness of Scripture in the domains of both history and science. The interpretations of Professor Vawter and Professor Marsden cannot account for these Christians. This attractive centrist position is largely ignored in their studies.

Perhaps the nub of the matter is this. Professor Vawter and

Professor Marsden work with inappropriate visions of what constitutes the “central tradition” of the Christian church’s thinking about biblical authority. Professor Vawter regrettably defines accommodation in such a way that Scripture must have errors; in addition, he assumes that Augustine and his disciples viewed accommodation in this fashion. On another tack, Professor Marsden does not perceive that the Augustinian tradition—which he, as a loyal Calvinist, attempts to uphold—viewed the infallibility of the Bible as an important component of its doctrine of biblical authority.¹⁶⁵

It appears that a number of commentators today among post-Vatican II Roman Catholics and Protestant defenders of a “Reformed Epistemology” believe that a concern for the “christocentric focus” of Scripture and a concern for the Bible’s infallibility are incompatible elements of a doctrine of biblical authority.¹⁶⁶ To our mind, they are fostering a false dichotomy, one quite foreign to the Augustinian tradition. For Luther and Calvin, a concern to portray Christ as the focal point of Scripture did not entail a loss of concern for the truthfulness of the biblical accounts. Like Augustine, the Reformers believed that to attack biblical infallibility was to question biblical authority.

Why are many historians and theologians today proposing that “the central tradition” of the Christian churches did not encompass the doctrine of biblical inerrancy? One possible explanation is this. They surmise that if the Bible is only infallible for faith and practice, then it cannot be negatively affected by developments in “higher criticism” and evolutionary hypotheses. But as we have seen, their historical interpretations are not always persuasive. Moreover, it seems that their attempts to make some kind of allowance for macmevolution, for example, may become unnecessary even from their point of view. The changing theories of evolutionists are presently up for rigorous scrutiny. In a remarkable essay, “Agnostic Evolutionists, The taxonomic case against Darwin,” Tom Bethell writes:

The theory of evolution has never been falsified. On the other hand, it is also surely true that the positive evidence for evolution is very much weaker than most laymen imagine, and than many scientists want us to imagine. Perhaps, as Patterson says, that positive evidence is missing entirely.¹⁶⁷

Is it possible that future generations will view “macmevolution” as one of those hoary but quaint theories of days past?¹⁶⁸

Doubtless, Scripture itself should determine what our views of biblical authority are. On the other hand, it is instructive to learn that many Christians in centuries far removed from us affirmed a belief in the utter truthfulness of God’s Word. Even if some of them employed the rather formidable theological word *accommodation*, they probably found it awe-inspiring to realize that the all-powerful Lord God,

who was one and the same with their loving heavenly Father, had stooped to speak to humankind in mercy and in grace, using words that they basically understood. And for us today, if we sense even in a halting fashion the love that prompted this revelation, our hearts should be filled with gratitude for the Written Word, Holy Scripture, which speaks of the Living Word, our matchless Savior, Jesus Christ.