

DEFINING AND REFINING INERRANCY:
REVISITING THE DOCTRINE FOR THE 21st
CENTURY

By

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Abstract

This dissertation revisits the doctrine of inerrancy. It recognises that a new phase is being added to the inerrancy debate's already lengthy history, but at a time where a number of those seeking to contribute appear unaware of the fundamental issue, as to what inerrancy really means. Therefore, the dissertation focuses on that key issue, and defines inerrancy for the new phase of debate. To do so, it looks back to the previous phase of debate between 1978 and 1987 - drawing upon the strong scholarly work of that era – re-establishing a solid definition of inerrancy. This is attained by identifying, in part 1, that the appropriate method for reaching a definition is the retroductive method, a method which is applied to Scripture's teaching in parts 2 and 3 to propose a clear definition of inerrancy in the preliminary conclusion. In part 4, the writings of two contemporary theologians are analysed to see if the now re-established 20th century doctrine of inerrancy can be developed into a 21st century model. The goal is eventually achieved by applying Vanhoozer's model of 'dramatic doctrine' to inerrancy, giving a fresh refinement to the definition and bringing a new contribution to the debate.

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Abbreviations

<i>BAGD</i>	Bauer, W., <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> trans. Arndt, W.F. and Gingrich, F.W. 2 nd ed. Rev. and augmented by Gingrich, F.W. and Danker, F.W. from Bauer's 5 th edn. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979)
<i>BETS</i>	Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society
<i>CBQ</i>	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
<i>JASA</i>	Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation
<i>JETS</i>	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
<i>JTS</i>	Journal of Theological Studies
<i>TDNT</i>	Schrenk, S., <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , G.W.Bromiley (trans. and ed.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76)
<i>TJ</i>	Trinity Journal
<i>WTJ</i>	Westminster Theological Journal

Introduction

The inerrancy debate is one of crucial importance. The way a person answers the question ‘is the Bible inerrant?’ has major ramifications not only for their theologising and conceptualising of the authority of Scripture, but also for their philosophy of religion and epistemological basis for belief, so careful thought concerning the topic is vital.

With such important issues at stake, the subject of inerrancy has been debated for over one hundred and fifty years¹ as generations of scholars have sought to wrestle with the subject, each attempting the complex task of understanding the intricacies of the doctrine. In its long history, the debate has advanced and receded marked by periods of greater attention paid to the topic, interspersed with those of lesser interest; but with two very definite waves of concentrated debate identifiable in the year 1893, and between the years of 1976 and 87.² As the time duration shows, the second of these two episodes was the most intense period of the debate’s history so far – the debate’s (so far) climax coming in the early to mid 1980s – before falling away after 1987.

Today we stand at an interesting juncture in the debate. Following the intense and heated discussions of that time culminating in the late eighties, the debate has cooled somewhat, and proportionately, very little has been written on the subject in the intervening twenty years. However, recently, following the publication of provocative books such as Enns’ *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of*

¹ H.D.McDonald, *Theories of Revelation* (London: George Allen and Lunwin, 1963) pp.197–99. Although the issue of the truthfulness of the Bible is one that all generations of Christians have had to contend for (right back to the earliest apologetics of the Church Fathers), the ‘Inerrancy debate’ is a title given to a particular period of debate after the Enlightenment (see survey below).

² Ibid., p.199.

the Old Testament,³ and McGowan's *The Divine Spiration of Scripture*,⁴ interest has returned to the subject, implying that the debate is back, and another phase is being added to its long history – one that could perhaps grow to even greater intensity than the previous one.⁵

This contemporary chapter of the debate will obviously be of much interest to the theologian today because of its immediate relevance, however, also of importance - because of the context they give for the contemporary period – are the questions as to where the debate was left at the end of the previous episode of heated debate, and what has happened in the intervening years between then and today's interest. Discussion of the former will be left until later, but the question as to what has happened between the phases is here worthy of reflection because of the *immediate* context it gives to the contemporary phase.

Between the phases

As already said, following 1987, the debate entered a period of quiet as scholarly interest appeared to fade. There is varied speculation as to why this was, but what can be said for certain concerning this quietening and ensuing break from debating inerrancy (from 1988 to 2004), is that it has had both positive and negative implications for the inerrancy debate and theology in general. Positively, the break

³ (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) Following the publication of such a controversial book, and reviews of varying sympathy (see particularly the review by Beale 'Myth, History and Incarnation: A Review article of Inspiration and Incarnation by Peter Enns' *JETS* 49.2 [June 2006] 287-312 [followed immediately by Enns' rejoinder 'Response to G.K.Beale's Review Article of *Inspiration and Incarnation*,' *JETS* 49.2 [June 2006] 313-326] [Beale's latest response to Enns has been the publication of his *The Erosion of Inerrancy* {Wheaton: Crossway, 2008} in which he challenges Enns' postmodern presuppositions whilst strongly advocating commitment to inerrancy]), Westminster Theological Seminary suspended Enns because his work was found to be in contradiction with the faculty's statement of faith, the Westminster Confession.

⁴ (Leicester: Apollos, 2007) McGowan himself (despite the majority of the book being orthodox insights into a Reformed doctrine of Scripture) recognises that taking the position he does on inerrancy is "like putting a stick in a hornets' nest." (p.210)

⁵ See further the survey below for where we lie in the debate's history.

has refreshed the debate, allowing those previously concentrating on inerrancy to devote more attention to the discussions being had in other areas of study (e.g. hermeneutics, culture and epistemology⁶), in the intervening years. All of these areas have brought very useful insights to theology - particularly into our use of language, and the way we view things - making us a lot more aware of the way we think, our backgrounds, horizons of understanding and encouraging dialogue with scholars in the related field but who come from totally different backgrounds (i.e. theologians from Africa, South America, etc.).

But negatively, the length of the break has meant that, with discussion re-emerging on the subject of inerrancy only after about twenty years, unfortunately, some of the lessons learned from the previous era of the debate's history seem to be being lost and forgotten, as a new generation of scholars set about addressing the issue. On a popular level this is illustrated quite poignantly by the number of people who, when asking of the Bible's inerrancy, are all too unaware of the writings of the past era where many of their questions on the subject have already been asked - and many also answered - in the fruitful discussions had when the debate was at its most intense. But this is also an issue at the scholarly level too. Even within the Evangelical Theological Society - membership of which is limited to those who accept inerrancy - awareness of important discussions on inerrancy from days gone by is becoming dim.⁷ The very

⁶ A clear example of this shift is well-known defenders of inerrancy, D.A.Carson and J.D.Woodbridge, switching from co-editing books on the doctrine of Scripture (see books below) to addressing issues to do with culture and interpretation (e.g. *God and Culture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993]).

⁷ Implied by comments from the 56th Annual Meeting (November 19, 2004) of the Evangelical Theological Society, when, seeking to clarify aspects of their doctrinal basis, so few were clear what was meant by inerrancy that the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy had to be copied and given to every member to proceed with clarifications (source: J.S.Sexton, 'How far beyond Chicago? Assessing recent attempts to reframe the Inerrancy debate' *Themelios* 34.1 [April 2009] 26 fn.2).

The decline in understanding of what is meant by inerrancy is further supported by Beale's major concern in *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) that in recent times, scholars are (often inadvertently) redefining inerrancy and it is going unnoticed by Evangelical scholars because of their own unawareness. One particularly contemporary scholar who would fall within Beale's thesis would be Sparks (*God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation*

real danger being that the same mistakes will be (and in fact are being) made, and the same questions asked as of the older period, instead of learning from that era and building upon its findings.⁸ As will be seen in the literature survey below, the fruitful period referred to above was during that of 1978 and 87,⁹ during which much discussion was had as searching questions were asked of the doctrine of inerrancy to see if it really held weight and was rational to believe. At this time, inerrancy really had to be presented at its best, so there is much to be learned from such an era.

Aims

This thesis therefore is a re-visitation of the doctrine of inerrancy, in light of the renewed interest in this area within the academy, and will seek to do two things. Primarily it will address one of the key questions in the debate - what inerrancy (at its strongest) really means, re-exposing the doctrine again to critical analysis, and so give some pointers for those today who are trying to draw a conclusion as to whether the Bible is inerrant or not. This will be done with particular reference to the writings of 1978-1987 where the inerrancy position had to be laid out at its strongest (so making sure that the important scholarly lessons of the past era are not forgotten) and will be the major focus of our study. But secondarily, having achieved the first aim, this dissertation will briefly seek to explore whether the concept of inerrancy - even the

of Critical Biblical Scholarship [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008]). The reader becomes particularly sceptical of Sparks' claim to understand what is meant by inerrancy – and so wanting to call himself an inerrantist – when he affirms things such as “*at face value, Scripture does not seem to furnish us with one divine theology*” but rather “*gives us numerous theologies*” (p.121 emphasis his), “modern critical research makes it likely . . . that Jesus has not told us who really wrote the Pentateuch, Isaiah, or Daniel” (p.165) and (in reference to the teaching of other religions) “We are wise to embrace the *truth* in whatever way that God brings it to us” (p.278 emphasis mine).

⁸ One is reminded of C.S.Lewis' quote “If you join at eleven o'clock a conversation which began at eight you will often not see the real bearing of what is said...It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between.” (Taken from Lewis' introduction to Athanasius' *On the Incarnation* Available: http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/history/ath-inc.htm#ch_0 [Accessed 6th May 2009])

⁹ This is slightly narrower than the time period outlined above because (as the survey below shows) that phase was triggered by some less helpful writings, better responses appearing from 1978 onwards.

most thoroughly defined version of it to date – can be refined in any way to make it possibly more suitable for debate in the 21st century. With the debate having entered a new phase, is it possible to develop and modify the 20th century definition to propose a newer model of inerrancy, one more fitting for the age we are now in?

Literature Survey

The above has highlighted a window of approximately eleven years when the inerrancy debate was at its hottest so far, and nine years within those eleven where a lot of the questions of today were being debated in a scholarly fashion. However, this all came in reaction to certain previous writings and key figures in a debate that, as said above, has actually lasted over a hundred and fifty years. From the end of the 19th century through the beginnings of the 20th century, B.B.Warfield spent most of his career writing on the subject of inspiration and inerrancy and, though he was by no means the writer who started the debate¹⁰ (nor were his views accepted everywhere at the start of the century¹¹), his writings came to be recognised as the standard with which every subsequent writer needed to engage. Krabbendam:

[Warfield's] repeated and thorough preoccupation with the inspiration of Scripture has not only placed a stamp on American Reformed and Presbyterian thought but has even gained him the accolade of being the greatest contributor ever to this theme.¹²

For this reason, Warfield will be one of the key dialogue-partners in this thesis as I seek to lay out inerrancy at its strongest. Another key figure was J.I.Packer, who, in

¹⁰ Most attribute this to L.Gaussen and his *Theopneustia: The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1841), but it was only when Warfield (and to an extent Hodge) began writing in detail (clarifying the issue that inerrancy only referred to the autographs) that the inerrancy debate really began to be fought.

¹¹ For evangelical opposition to Warfield's views, see J.Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910) who also influenced Kuyper and Bavinck in their views (e.g. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003]).

¹² H.Krabbendam, "B.B.Warfield vs G.C.Berkouwer on Scripture" in *Inerrancy*, N.Geisler (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) p.413.

step with the Princetonians (most notoriously J.Gresham Machen¹³) set out to defend the Scripture Principle and refute liberalism and so developed Warfield's notion of inerrancy in his book, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*.¹⁴ Packer, too, will be an important dialogue partner, particularly when I come to define what inerrancy means. Apart from Packer's landmark, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, and a few other publications,¹⁵ the mid-20th century saw (like the nineties to 2004) a phase of quiet on this issue until the nineteen-sixties and seventies where Fuller Seminary's declining view on inerrancy gave rise to the writings of scholars such as C.Pinnock, who spent the earlier part of his career avidly defending inerrancy,¹⁶ and who was one of the group of leading conservatives¹⁷ to form the Ligionier statement affirming inerrancy (1973) later published in a compendium, *God's Inerrant Word*¹⁸ (an attempt by inerrantists to respond to the shift that Fuller seminary had begun). As the seventies went on, more and more literature from both sides began to emerge from the likes of Beegle,¹⁹ Schaeffer²⁰ and (one of the very few non-English speaking contributors) Berkouwer,²¹ causing the debate to warm into the mid 70s. But it was only in 1976 when Harold Lindsell published his (in)famous book, *The Battle for the Bible*,²² that the debate really became concentrated. Lindsell (one of the former members of staff on the Fuller faculty) exposed what had happened at Fuller and why

¹³ *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923, 1974 reprint).

¹⁴ (Leicester: IVF, 1958) see also *God has spoken*, 2nd edn. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979).

¹⁵ The best known being E.J.Young's *Thy Word is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) and C.F.H.Henry's *Revelation and the Bible* (Cambridge: Tyndale, 1958) which was just a taster for his sizable 6 volume *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vols. 1-6 (Waco: Word, 1976-83) which emerged when the debate warmed up.

¹⁶ For example *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) (though Pinnock later disowned his earlier position in *The Scripture Principle* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985]).

¹⁷ Along with R.C.Sproul, J.Frame, J.Gernster, J.W.Montgomery, and J.I.Packer.

¹⁸ J.W.Montgomery (ed.), *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974).

¹⁹ *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

²⁰ *No Final Conflict: The Bible without Error in all that it affirms* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975).

²¹ *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

²² (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

they took the position they did, which subsequently opened the floodgates for the stream of literature that was to follow.

Lindsell's book gave license for the first time for open opposition among evangelicals to the doctrine of inerrancy, an opportunity received gladly by the likes of Davis²³ who was very clear about his desire to remain in the evangelical camp but without accepting inerrancy. Yet, the leading opponent to inerrancy appeared to have been Jack Rogers who, building upon the work of his doctoral thesis, co-wrote, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*²⁴ with Donald McKim in which they challenged the inerrancy position arguing that it was out of line with how the Church had viewed Scripture and instead was simply a rationalist philosophical position which Warfield had adopted mainly due to the influence of Francis Turretin. In response to this, those who advocated inerrancy set up a second (and this time, even more thorough than the Ligionier) council – the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) - which in 1978 produced the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI), followed by writings expounding it from then until 1987²⁵. As said above, it is particularly the writings of this period that are of value to this thesis (and any study of inerrancy), because with opposition mounting even within the evangelical academy (not to mention the on-going onslaught from outside) such

²³ *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977).

²⁴ (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

²⁵ E.g. J.M.Boice (ed.), *The Foundations of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), J.I.Packer, *God has spoken*, 2nd edn. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979), N.Geisler (ed.), *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), R.Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (eds.), *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), D.A.Carson and J.D.Woodbridge (eds.), *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), C.F.H.Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vols. 1-6 (Waco: Word, 1976-83), J.Hannah (ed.), *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), D.A.Carson and J.D.Woodbridge (eds.), *Hermeneutic, Authority and Canon* (Leicester: IVP, 1986). (Note, although the Carson and Woodbridge volumes are not directly from the ICBI, they are sympathetic to it and illustrate that there were evangelical scholars outside of ICBI who were just as committed to expounding the position.)

publications had to be of the highest order to defend the position and enable it to survive into the 21st century.

After the ICBI's publications and the disputes following, from 1987 onwards discussion on inerrancy quietened and apart from the occasional book, most writings on Scripture turned to other issues with just passing comments about inerrancy. However from 2005, contributions again began to appear such as Enns', *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*²⁶, McGowan's, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture*²⁷, Wright's, *Scripture and the Authority of God*²⁸ and Beale's, *The Erosion of Inerrancy*²⁹, which implies that the debate is no longer on a break, but has re-ignited again³⁰. McGowan is of particular interest in the contemporary debate because he claims to be in neither the inerrantist camp nor the Fuller / Rogers and McKim camp, he tries to place himself between the two. This intriguing recent addition to the debate will therefore be a further book interacted with, particularly towards the end of the thesis.

Limitations

As the survey of literature above indicates, the inerrancy debate is one which is mainly fought over within evangelicalism. So, although some of the contributors from outside of this tradition will be mentioned, this dissertation will be concerned mainly

²⁶ (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

²⁷ (Leicester: Apollos, 2007).

²⁸ (London: SPCK, 2005).

²⁹ (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008). See further: C.Bovell, *Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), W.Brueggemann, *The Book That Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), K.L.Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), C.D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) B. Witherington, *The Living Word of God* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), and W.P. Brown (ed.), *Engaging Biblical Authority* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

³⁰ Also offering (re)contributions to the debate are Bloesch and Pinnock with second and revised editions of their previous books (Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation* [Illinois: IVP, 1994 now 2005] and Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985] [now C.Pinnock with B.L.Callen, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible*, 2nd edn. {London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006}].

with the writings of evangelicals on the matter. It is also obvious that with the exception of Berkouwer, the inerrancy debate is almost completely one that has taken place in an English-speaking context - mainly in America, but with a few contributions from Britain.³¹ Therefore, there will be little engagement with literature of other languages. Lastly, this dissertation will focus specifically on the *theological* aspect of the debate due to the confines of space. The Rogers and McKim proposal highlights that there is definitely a historical side to this debate too, and responses to that have come from the likes of Woodbridge³² amongst others³³. This will, however, have to be left for others to address as this thesis is primarily interested in the theological facet of inerrancy, namely, the Scriptural aspect of the doctrine.

Structure

To achieve the primary aim set out above, parts 1-3 of this dissertation will lay out and define inerrancy in its strongest form. The thesis will begin by looking carefully at methods – particularly that of Warfield - used in constructing doctrine in part 1, to give a basis for what is to follow. Part 2 (chapters 2 and 3) will take the findings from that methodological analysis and start applying them to draw up a doctrine of inerrancy by doing a survey of Scripture's general teaching about its origin, followed by a closer analysis of its inspiration. Part 3 (chapters 4, 5 and 6) will take the findings of part 2 and then suggest the beginnings of a definition for the word inerrancy, after which the question of difficult phenomena will be introduced asking how and whether they challenge the definition (and rationality) of inerrancy laid out

³¹ See J.S.Sexton, 'How far Beyond Chicago?', 42, particularly fn 118. See also McGowan's comments *Spiration*, pp.48, 214 as well as Allert's *High View*, p.32.

³² *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers / McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

³³ For another example see R.H.Balmer, 'The Princetonians and Scripture: A Reconsideration', *WTJ* 44 (1982) 352-365. For further analysis of the historical aspect of the debate, see J.Hannah (ed.), *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984).

at the end of chapter 4, and whether it needs to be discarded / adjusted in light of that. For this to happen, a selection of the notoriously difficult phenomena (which dissuade many from believing the Bible to be inerrant) will be highlighted and the best suggested resolutions for them analysed to see if such resolutions resolve the issue or whether inerrancy needs to be refined / abandoned in light of this. These findings will therefore bring us to a preliminary conclusion at the end of parts 1-3 which will allow us to clear the path for those seeking to ask whether the Bible really is inerrant or not. This will be done by clearly defining what is meant by inerrancy, and in the process, offering a few indicators as to whether it is rational to believe in such a doctrine. This preliminary conclusion will then be followed by part 4 which will analyse some recent developments in the doctrine of Scripture and ask whether inerrancy needs to be modified in light of such developments to fulfil this dissertation's second aim. In chapter 7, McGowan's recent alternative view to inerrancy will be scrutinised to determine if it might be a better and stronger model of inerrancy for future debate, then chapter 8, the work of Vanhoozer on doctrine in general (which has learnt positive lessons from the research done in the quiet period of 1988-2004) will be examined to see if his work could help improve the doctrine of inerrancy arrived at in the preliminary conclusion at the end of part 3, to potentially propose an improved model for continued debate concerning the doctrine of inerrancy in the 21st century.

Part 1

Methodology

Chapter 1: Approaching a Study of Inerrancy

In trying to define a doctrine of inerrancy, it is essential that the methodology used for such doctrine formulation is right and consistent. This might sound obvious and a statement that could apply to any discipline, but it is particularly the case when looking at the study of inerrancy, because even the slightest of mistakes in method lead, not just to less accurate, but wrong conclusions, so it is really important that we approach the field with the correct methodology.

With this in mind, it is rather surprising to discover just how little has been written on methods for approaching the doctrine of inerrancy. With the exception of Warfield (one of the key writers in the inerrancy debate), most who have written on inerrancy since have said little - if anything - about method; on the contrary, certain theological methods have tended to be *assumed* in debate rather than examined carefully,³⁴ which, has unfortunately resulted in a break down of dialogue because opponents have been starting from different places with different assumptions. This in itself is a warning against rushing into debate without grappling with issues of methodology and knowing how one should proceed. So before continuing to try and put together, and so define what is meant by a doctrine of inerrancy, this thesis will begin (part 1) by seeking to put forward a correct methodology for formulating doctrine, which, once established, will be applied as far as is possible to forming a doctrine of inerrancy, and used as the basis for parts 2-3 in seeking to define this doctrine.

To arrive at this methodology, we shall begin by drawing some general principles about the methods we use to study any discipline, which will give us a rough idea as

³⁴ A lot of this was to do with the influence of Warfield's writings. Those who were proponents of inerrancy often accepted Warfield's method without question (see for example the numerous papers in the compendium *Inerrancy* [N.Geisler {ed.} {Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980} – the compendium produced following the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy], all of which assume Warfield's method [with the exception of Feinburg's contribution which will be discussed later in this chapter]). However those who disagreed with inerrancy sought to attack Warfield's method, yet (as we shall see) very few ever succeeded in properly understanding and engaging with it.

to how we might start formulating a theological method to construct a doctrine. This will be followed by a careful examination of Warfield's method for drawing up a doctrine, to see how much of that is *actually* useful for doctrine formulation today. As part of the Warfield study, issues to do with the relationship between inductive and deductive reasoning will be looked at, which should sharpen our method yet further; then we will hone the method once more by turning to the field of science to see if any help there can be given for putting together theories and hypotheses, applying anything gleaned to our formulation of doctrine. This will give us a firm methodology to follow for the writing of the thesis.³⁵

General principles

In all disciplines, the standard procedure for analysing an entity is to work from the whole, then to the part – the individual details – and then back to the whole again, the study of the details helping in the appreciation of the whole.³⁶ A piece of art or music is a good example of this where one stands and looks at a painting or the score of a symphony, then having taken in the whole, studies the themes / colours / motifs of the work, which in turn brings about a greater understanding of the piece. When applied to literature (the entity in this case being a book), to understand a certain area / theme of the book should involve reading all the way through to get an overall impression of what the book says about itself, followed by detailed exegesis on certain verses / sentences and paragraphs, followed by a stepping back again – the exegesis of the detail giving us a deeper understanding of the whole. So the obvious application to

³⁵ Such discussion will also likely open up some deeper methodological questions to do with faith and rationality which, though interesting, lie beyond the boundaries of this dissertation. However, one such question is of indirect relevance to this dissertation, so is discussed in the Appendix.

³⁶ P.Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2002) p.198.

formulating a doctrine (of Scripture) in theology then is that the book / piece of work one is studying is the Bible and the same approach should be used.

So (beginning part 2), chapter 2 of this thesis will be a general overview of what the Bible says about itself to help us begin formulating a doctrine of Scripture.

This first stage in assessing Scripture is relatively uncontroversial, however, difficulties tend to emerge when working from the whole to the individual parts, and indeed which parts we should be carefully exegeting.

Warfield's method for drawing a doctrine (of inspiration and inerrancy)

Warfield's approach in his famous book, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*,³⁷ was to look through Scripture seeing what it had to say about itself (see above), then (moving on to the stage of working from the whole to the parts) he is well known for exegeting (very deeply) specific verses he thought should be the basis of his doctrine – in this case primarily 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21, as well as verses such as Matthew 5:17-18 and John 10:35. So Warfield's doctrine of inspiration was inductive.³⁸ As Warfield knew (and the footnote below shows), inductive arguments are stronger or weaker depending on the degree of probability that their premises

³⁷ (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948).

³⁸ It might be helpful to define what we are talking about with 'induction' and 'deduction'. Although there are more contemporary explanations available (e.g. Tomassi, *Logic* [London: Routledge, 1999] pp.7-9) Feinburg's ("The Meaning of Inerrancy" in *Inerrancy*, N.Geisler [ed.], p.270) paraphrase of Copi (*Introduction to Logic*, 3rd edn, [New York: Macmillan, 1968] pp.20-21) is perhaps the clearest, explaining that every argument is based on premises which provide evidence for the truth of its conclusion, "deduction and induction differ in the nature of their premises and the relationship between the premises and their conclusion. In deduction the premises may be *general* assumptions or propositions from which *particular* conclusions are derived. The distinctive characteristic of deduction, however, is its demonstration of relationship between two or more propositions. Furthermore, a deductive argument involves the claim that its premises *guarantee* the truth of its conclusion. Where the premises are both the necessary and sufficient condition for the truth of the conclusion, the argument is said to be valid. Where the premises fail to provide such evidence, the argument is said to be invalid. With induction, on the other hand, the relationship between premises and conclusion is much more modest. The premises only provide *some* evidence for the conclusion. Inductive arguments are not valid or invalid. They are better or worse, depending on the degree of probability that their premises confer on their conclusions. Moreover, in induction the premises are *particulars*, and the conclusions are *generalizations*, the data being organized under the most general categories possible." (italics Feinburg's).

confer on their conclusions, which is why much time was spent exegeting carefully set verses - to give firm grounds for his conclusion that the Bible was the word of God (see part 2: chapters 2 and 3). He then worked deductively from this point to draw the secondary conclusion that the Bible is inerrant, by taking his (induced) findings of Scripture (e.g. 2 Tim 3:16 = that the Bible is the word of God) and combining them with (induced) findings about God's nature (e.g. Titus 1:2 = that God never lies) to deduce the conclusion that the Bible always speaks the truth (is inerrant) and never lies.³⁹ From this framework, he assumed that everything in the Bible was true, so about any discrepancies or contradictions that might appear to negate his doctrine he said

...we approach the study of the so-called 'phenomena' of the Scriptures with a very strong presumption that these Scriptures contain no errors, and that any 'phenomena' apparently inconsistent with their inerrancy are so in appearance only...⁴⁰

With this in mind, Kelsey's comment is entirely justified:

[Warfield's approach]...is a vast hypothesis functioning methodologically like the Copernican theory or the theory of evolution. Anyone who relies on the hypothesis has the confidence that any conflicts that appear between facts and the hypothesis can be explained within the framework of the hypothesis. It would take an enormous number of conflicts to raise serious doubts about the hypothesis.⁴¹

However, Warfield's approach has been largely criticised, mainly for the reason that it is too narrow and selective in its inductive methodology. Beegle for example wrote a book in which he accused Warfield - and all the inerrantists who follow his approach - as being far too selective in their 'inductive method' as to which parts of the Bible

³⁹ W.Abraham (*The Divine Inspiration of Scripture* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981]) and K.R.Trembath (*Evangelical Theories of Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* [New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987]) argued that actually all of Warfield's doctrine was deductive-only in approach, and so sought to draw up a more inductive view of Scripture of their own. However (as we shall see in chapter 3), their own efforts are rather weak and ignore how much exegetical (inductive) work Warfield did before he starting deducing conclusions such as inerrancy.

⁴⁰ B.B.Warfield, 1959, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. S.Craig, (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott) p.215.

⁴¹ D.H.Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM, 1975) p.22.

they would use to build their doctrine, taking only the verses that would give good grounds for the doctrine they want to arrive at, but leaving out any other verses that would point away from the doctrine (or rather only interpreting them / bending them to fit their inerrancy framework).⁴² Beegle's main criticism of Warfield is that his doctrine has only been derived from his chosen handful of 'key' verses. Why did Warfield not take into account the numerous 'phenomena'⁴³ which negate a doctrine of inerrancy, exegete them as thoroughly as 2 Tim 3:16, and include the 'mistakes' into his doctrine of inspiration (instead of coming back to them only *after* having come to his doctrine – the 'mistakes' therefore being interpreted in light of his doctrine)? Put another way, Beegle is unhappy with Warfield giving more weight to a verse like 2 Tim 3:16 than a discrepancy such as Mark 2:26 (see part 3).

Interestingly, Warfield would have agreed to a certain extent with some of what Beegle is saying. He did not want to be associated with those he called "older dogmaticians" who indulged in proof-texting, rather, he spoke about the importance in exegesis of learning from "the whole body of modern scholarship" to discover "a form of Scripture proof on a larger scale than can be got from single texts."⁴⁴ So both Beegle and Warfield wanted to see inductive exegesis used properly (as well as

⁴² D.M.Beegle, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) which then led to *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973). This idea of wanting to arrive at a certain doctrine is hinted at by Trembath who argues that rather than (1) following inductive methodology as they [Warfield and followers] claimed and (2) drawing their doctrines concerning the Bible *from* the Bible, they were actually influenced by uninspected premises and assumptions that guaranteed certain kinds of conclusions about the Bible which were drawn ultimately from what the Church believed about the Bible. (K.R.Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* [New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987] pp.9-10). Trembath's comment is an interesting one, which introduces us to the question of how the Church has viewed Scripture throughout its history. However (as said in the introduction), comment is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The reader is encouraged to read J.B. Rogers and D.K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979]) as well as J.D.Woodbridge's response (*Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982]) to follow the historical aspect of the inerrancy debate.

⁴³ 'Phenomena' (as will have been seen in the Warfield quote) has become a word used to refer to verses in Scripture that appear to have an error in them – see part 3 of this thesis.

⁴⁴ B.B.Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948) p.198.

deduction) in the forming of doctrine. But in that case why did they come to different conclusions as to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture? Through close reading of their literature, it becomes apparent that two differing understandings / meanings of the term ‘induction’ are being employed. The first understanding is demonstrable from Warfield’s method; he started by exegeting a handful of the Bible’s clearest statements (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pt 1:20-21; Jn 10:35) concerning Scripture’s ontological nature, in order to start building a doctrine of inspiration (and then inerrancy followed as a second-order doctrine with further work on Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18). On the other hand, the second understanding is implied in Beegle’s criticism of Warfield, in that that he thinks induction means that the Bible’s own didactic statements – its teaching on itself - should only be given the same credence as any other verse, and Beegle would be quite happy to begin formulating his doctrine by exegeting *any* verse whether it was a clear one on Scripture’s nature or not. Beegle’s understanding of induction is problematic because as Nicole states:⁴⁵

If the Bible does make express statements about itself, these manifestly must have a priority in our attempts to formulate a doctrine of Scripture. Quite obviously, induction from Bible phenomena will also have its due place, for it may tend to correct certain inaccuracies which might take place in the deductive process. The statements of Scripture, however are always primary. To apply the method advocated by Dr. Beegle in other areas would quite probably lead to seriously erroneous results. For instance, if we attempted to construct our view of the relation of Christ to sin merely in terms of the concrete data given us in the gospels about his life, and without regard to certain express statements found in the New Testament about his sinlessness, we might mistakenly conclude that Christ was not sinless...[This] is not meant to disallow induction [of phenomena] as a legitimate factor, but it is meant to deny it the priority in religious matters. First must come the statements of revelation, and the induction may be introduced as a legitimate confirmation, and, in some cases, as a corrective in areas where our interpretation of these statements and their implications may be at fault.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Note: In the following quote Nicole uses the terms ‘induction’ and ‘deduction’ as meant by Beegle. What these terms *really* mean will be shown below.

⁴⁶ R.R.Nicole ‘The Inspiration of Scripture: B.B.Warfield and Dr. Dewey M. Beegle’ *The Gordon Review* 8 (1964-65) 106 cited in D.A.Carson, “Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture” in

What Beegle actually means by induction is what scientists call *enumerative* induction (as opposed to true induction). But as Moreland exposes, “enumerative induction is not the standard way scientists form and test theories.”⁴⁷ Beegle’s error is that he wants to exegete isolated narrative verses before looking at Scripture’s didactic statements about how to interpret those narrative verses. McGrath and Geisler offer helpful correctors:

[McGrath] Doctrine provides a ‘conceptual framework’, suggested by the biblical narrative itself, for interpreting that narrative.⁴⁸

[Geisler] Doctrines are not based in the data or phenomena of Scripture; they are *based* in the teaching of Scripture and *understood* in the light of the phenomena of Scripture.⁴⁹

So the induction Beegle is advocating is not the induction that is used in day to day study of an entity, it is something both different and wrong for this particular area of study. Warfield is to be preferred therefore in his understanding / meaning of induction and is correct in approaching a text (in our case Scripture) in the way he has. So we can conclude this mini-section learning that his methodology gives us a helpful start in showing how doctrine should be formulated: one starts by looking through Scripture gaining an overall feel for what it says of itself, then exegetes (induction) the clearer verses to see what they say about the ontological nature of what one is studying. Then, from that, one deduces some conclusions to give a framework from within which to read and understand the book, and only then does one begin thinking about some of the phenomena and how they are to be understood within that.

Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon, D.A.Carson and J.D.Woodbridge (eds.) (Leicester: IVP, 1986) p.24.

⁴⁷ J.P.Moreland, ‘The Rationality of Belief in Inerrancy’, *TJ* 7.1 (Spring 1986) 82.

⁴⁸ A.McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) pp.58-59.

⁴⁹ N.Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) p.21 (emphasis his).

The above part of Warfield's method is helpful. However, one particular area in which Warfield's methodological formulation demonstrated weakness is that, whilst, granted, he approached the phenomena with the right framework, he would have arrived at a better doctrine of inerrancy had he spent more time looking at the phenomena in his work and shown whether they genuinely are just 'apparent' (by showing how some of them could be resolved) or what happens to the doctrine if a large number cannot be satisfactorily resolved. Indeed, his predecessor and colleague, Hodge, commented, "Our views of inspiration must be determined by the phenomena of the Bible as well as by its didactic statements."⁵⁰ So although we shall begin using Warfield's method as a helpful starting place, our doctrine and definition of inerrancy will need to be refined in the light of the phenomena of Scripture.

The above method (though it is the *beginnings* of a good method for forming a doctrine of inerrancy), is where too many inerrantists leave questions of methodology. Most of their writings on inerrancy assume that this is the correct way to formulate a doctrine of inerrancy, and Warfield cannot really be improved upon. But are things quite so simple?

Arthur Holmes was the first to raise questions about the roles of induction and deduction in drawing doctrines in theology. Holmes stated that on their own, neither induction nor deduction was the appropriate form of logic to apply to the discipline of theology, because employing induction alone would be to treat theology as if it was the subject of *early* modern science,⁵¹ and to use deduction alone would be to treat

⁵⁰ C.Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribners 1871) 1:170. Note: For reasons that will become apparent, the Princetonian scholars used the words 'inspiration' and 'inerrancy' virtually synonymously in their writings on Scripture.

⁵¹ Not, as we shall see, contemporary modern science.

theology as if it were mathematics.⁵² Holmes did not have *too* much of a problem with the way that Warfield *combined* induction and deduction to draw a *general* doctrine of inerrancy, but he challenges those who follow Warfield's 'induction-deduction' methodology by identifying that the doctrine they draw from this method - particularly when it comes to the doctrine of inerrancy - is doctrine that can only be drawn with equivocation.⁵³ What Holmes meant by this was that though there might be considerable evidence in the Bible to draw a conclusion that the Bible is inerrant (by following the inductive-deductive method outlined above), there is not enough evidence to come to it as defined by many inerrantists today (see chapter 4). Holmes' challenge, (as will be seen in chapter 4) is justified. To help address the question, Holmes looked into the domain of the philosophy of science to investigate if any hypothesis formulation could be drawn upon to help in the formulation of doctrine. This was followed not long after with a more extensive article by Montgomery in which he too pointed theologians towards science to help with doctrine formulation.⁵⁴ So it is to the domain of science that we now turn to determine if it can shed any more light on the correct methods for study.

The philosophy of science and its application to theological method

Theology for a time used to be known as the queen of sciences. The philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon, spoke of God having given two revelations of himself, one in

⁵² A.F.Holmes, 'Ordinary Language Analysis and Theological method' *BETS* 11.3 (Summer 1968) 133-135. Holmes spells out the consequences of doing this very clearly in his article.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 137. An interesting discussion / debate emerged between Holmes and Geisler over the issue of method as was recorded in the *Bulletins of the Evangelical Theological Society* 11.3 and 11.4 - Summer and Fall editions. A lot later, Holmes added in a letter "However much progress we make *inductively*, the resultant generalization still amounts to less than total inerrancy: at best probability will result. Further, I think that no set of biblical statements supplies sufficient premises to *deduce* total inerrancy as defined and qualified by careful theologians." (Letter dated October 31st, 1978) Source: Feinburg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy", p.274, fn 25.

⁵⁴ J.W.Montgomery "Theologian's craft: A Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology" in *The Suicide of Christian Theology*, J.W.Montgomery (ed.) (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1970) pp.267-313.

Scripture – the study of which is called theology, and the other in creation - the study of which is called science,⁵⁵ and in a number of ways the two disciplines are similar. Just as scientists stand under their domain (matter – the physical world) and examine it for what it is without being able to add to it, so theologians have to stand under Scripture. They have to take it on its own terms realising they cannot add or take away anything from it. Montgomery draws up a chart that looks like this.⁵⁶

	Science	Theology
The Data (Epistemological certainty presupposed)	Nature	The Bible
Conceptual Gestalts (a pattern within which data appear intelligible)	Laws	Ecumenical Creeds (e.g. the apostles' creed) and historic confessions (e.g. the Augsburg Confession)
(In order of decreasing certainty) ↓	Theories	Theological Systems (e.g. Calvin's Institutes)
	Hypotheses	Theological proposals (e.g. Gustav Aulen's Christus Victor)

So whether or not we agree that we would classify theology as a science now – the comparisons above should mean that theologians should feel comfortable with looking at science's theories and methodologies to see if anything can be learnt from it about theologising.

The Oxford English Dictionary defined science as: "The systematic study of the nature and behaviour of the universe, based on observation, experimentation and

⁵⁵ Cited in J.Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion, 2007) p.21.

⁵⁶ Montgomery, "Theologian's craft", p.288.

measurement; and the formulation of rules to describe these facts in general terms.”⁵⁷

Therefore, the job of the scientist is to study physical matter and to devise laws, theories and hypotheses to describe and relate his/her findings. Karl Popper (drawing upon Wittgenstein’s analogy of a Net) describes making theories as “...nets cast to catch what we call ‘the world’: to rationalize, to explain, and to master it. We endeavour to make the mesh even finer and finer.”⁵⁸ It might be objected that this is a slightly arrogant description of science. Words such as ‘rationalize’, ‘explain’ and ‘master’ imply that the world is ours to grasp and take hold of in the same way that a badly phrased doctrine of Scripture could be argued to be saying the same about the Bible. However, the general idea and application to theology from the scientific method should be quite obvious - the theologian’s job in formulating doctrine is to cast a net to catch (the equivalent of the scientists’ object of study i.e. the verses of the Bible) and to propose a doctrine that describes and relate the findings. This idea of making the mesh – the doctrine finer and finer will be looked at below.

Contrary to popular opinion, science does not just proceed inductively (as for example Francis Bacon would have encouraged) in formulating theory,⁵⁹ rather

Hanson:

A theory is not pieced together from observed phenomena; it is rather what makes it possible to observe the phenomena as being

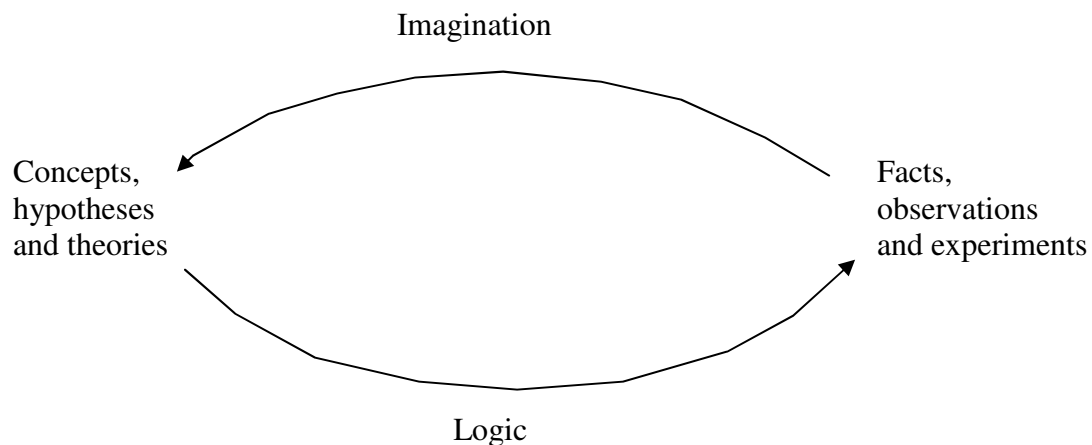
⁵⁷ This dictionary definition was cited in a lecture given by H.Thompson, *Hasn’t Science Outdated God?*, Truth Mission 2006. Since then, the Oxford Dictionary definition has changed and become somewhat looser (and for the purposes of this section, less helpful). Oxford philosophy of science professor John Lennox argues that to define science without bringing certain presuppositions to the definition is extremely difficult, (a likely reason for the Oxford Dictionary loosening its definition) so in his book *God’s Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* he speaks rather of what ‘scientific’ activity ‘involves’ (“hypothesis, experiment, data, evidence, modified hypothesis, theory, prediction, explanation and so on” (p.32) However, the definition Thompson cited is the clearest definition available when referring to the natural sciences of biology, chemistry and physics, so has been retained here. (See further McGrath’s musings over the distinction between *wissenschaften* and *naturwissenschaften* in his *A Systematic Theology*, vol.1 [Edinburgh and New York: T & T Clark, 2001] pp.25-26).

⁵⁸ K.R.Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* 2nd edn. (London: Hutchinson, 1959) p.59. cited in Montgomery, “The Theologians craft”, p.271.

⁵⁹ Note the distinction Holmes makes above between early modern science and contemporary modern science.

of a certain sort, and as related to other phenomena. Theories put phenomena into systems. They are built up in ‘reverse’ – retroductively. A theory is a cluster of conclusions in search of a premise. From the observed properties of phenomena the physicist reasons his way towards a keystone idea from which the properties are explicable as a matter of course.⁶⁰

Nash gives a helpful diagram to illustrate this⁶¹



So science is not simply induction, rather it is induction *and* deduction, constantly revising itself in light of both forms of logic as the diagram above shows. One observes the facts (induction), then deduces from this a possible theory, after which one checks and refines the theory by using induction again, then draws conclusions deductively etc. Montgomery calls this retroduction⁶² (whereas Holmes prefers the word adduction⁶³ – both words meaning the same thing). But, it should be noted that the above diagram, though it is helpful for showing the relationship between the two forms of logic, cannot really fully imply what happens. The scientist studies

⁶⁰ N.R.Hanson, *Pattern of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958) p.90 cited in Montgomery, “Theologian’s craft”, p.275.

⁶¹ L.K.Nash, *The Nature of the Natural Sciences* (Boston: Little Brown, 1963) p.324 cited in Montgomery, “Theologian’s craft”, p.274.

⁶² Montgomery, “Theologian’s craft”, pp.267-313.

⁶³ Holmes, ‘Ordinary Language’, 131-138.

inductively, then deduces a theory, *but holding that theory in mind*, s/he then goes back to induction followed by a refined deduction etc. Consequently, the second cycle is not fresh induction and deduction, but rather it has been framed to an extent by his/her previous findings. Again how this applies to forming a doctrine should be obvious. Warfield's doctrine started well with his induction followed by deduction, but he would have arrived at a much better doctrine of inerrancy had he refined his doctrine by having a closer look at some of the phenomena, following this retroductive approach – an approach more thorough for one studying a subject than simple induction-deduction. Understanding Warfield's limitation in his approach and learning the lessons from retroductive methodology should help as we move towards defining a doctrine of inerrancy because it will involve refining and sharpening the doctrine looked at by taking into account the phenomena of Scripture. This methodology should mean that a better understanding of the doctrine can be arrived at because it will be re-checked against the facts.

As well as pointing to the use of retroduction, the philosophy of science helps us further. It shows why Warfield was right in the beginnings of his method, because as Moreland identifies "...in forming a hypothesis [in science] it is best to start from clear cases or exemplars of the phenomenon to be explained. *One does not start with the borderline cases.*"⁶⁴ But it also helps us with a problem in a doctrine formulation that has so far stayed below the surface, namely if we deduce a doctrine of inerrancy, how many irresolvable phenomena would it take to falsify this doctrine? Moreland continues:

...studies in the philosophy of science show that it is very difficult to characterize when it is no longer rational to believe a scientific theory in presence of anomalies...Scientists can be rational in believing a hypothesis in the presence of anomalies

⁶⁴ Moreland, 'Rationality', 83 (emphasis mine).

by treating them as *alleged counter instances* rather than real counterinstances. This is true even if some anomaly – considered on its own – would more plausibly be understood as a refuting case of the hypothesis. The scientist is within his epistemic rights to suspend judgment, use *ad hoc* hypotheses, and refuse to give up the hypothesis in the presence of what appears to be a well-confirmed counterexample.⁶⁵

This would mean that if the premises put forward for a doctrine of inerrancy were sound, and inerrancy was a solidly deduced conclusion (after being revised as the retroductive method encourages), then someone who believed the Bible was inerrant would be justified in holding to this doctrine even if they were presented with a number of discrepancies they could not as yet resolve, or alternatively had to suspend judgment on or use *ad hoc* solutions. Learning from this last insight will affect this thesis in that work will need to be done on the phenomena of Scripture later in part 3. However, even if there are some difficulties found that appear irresolvable in that section (if the deduced framework of inerrancy is based upon sound exegesis of other verses), it would not be appropriate to call these unresolved discrepancies ‘errors’ or jettison a doctrine of inerrancy just because of these anomalies. They would be *as yet* unresolved discrepancies as opposed to errors. As has been suggested above, just how many of these ‘as yet’ unresolved discrepancies it would take to falsify the doctrine is a very difficult question to answer, however, it may not even be necessary to ask such a question (if there are no irresolvable discrepancies in Scripture) – judgment will be reserved until after having done critical exegesis on the phenomena. But we need to bear Moreland / the philosophy of science’s principle in mind when pursuing a doctrine, because as Pinnock says, “If we waited until all the difficulties were removed before we believed anything, we would believe nothing.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid., 83-84 (emphasis his).

⁶⁶ C.Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy” in *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, J.W.Montgomery (ed.) (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), p.152.

Conclusion

We have now arrived at a method for how one formulates a doctrine, which will be used throughout this thesis to help us draw a doctrine of inerrancy. Chapter 2 will begin by giving an overview of what Scripture teaches about itself and its origins, followed by chapter 3 which will exegete carefully the clearest verses to do with Scripture's 'inspiration'. Having done the first round of induction, this will be followed by how inerrancy is deduced from exegetical findings at the beginning of chapter 4. From such a deduction, this chapter will initially define inerrancy quite roughly, but then by applying a second round of induction, the definition will be sharpened in light of this secondary inductive work. This will be followed by chapters 5 and 6, a continuation of this second phase of induction in which a number of discrepancies will be examined to see if a doctrine of inerrancy and thus inspiration needs to be altered and refined yet further due to this or even if it needs to be rejected.

This will be following the retroductive methodology discussed above and will be particularly advantageous for the seven reasons Feinburg identifies:⁶⁷

1. It will retain a methodological continuity with the rest of doctrine formulation⁶⁸
2. It will retain both induction and deduction
3. It will place justification of the doctrine of inerrancy on a much broader evidential base (not simply 2 Tim 3:16 + Titus 1:2 = inerrancy)
4. It will mean that whatever form the doctrine of inerrancy takes, disconfirming it will be much harder (rather than some thinking that all it takes is to find one irresolvable discrepancy to disconfirm it)

⁶⁷ Feinburg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy", pp.275-276.

⁶⁸ From church history, we can see that (whether or not it was recognised as being a deliberate approach) doctrines take a lot of time and revision before they are settled upon – the Trinity being a good example – but they have been arrived at from a retroductive method.

5. It will give grounds for holding to the doctrine now despite not having all the answers to difficult phenomena
6. It will retain the distinction between the Bible and interpretation of it
7. It will leave open the door for a refined, upgraded doctrine of inerrancy to emerge in the future⁶⁹

⁶⁹ It might be objected then that the doctrine of inerrancy is not watertight or certain. We would have to reply (a) that humans being fallible (as opposed to the Bible being infallible) means that all doctrines are such (see the humble preface to the Chicago Statement of Inerrancy, Available: www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html [Accessed 3rd March 2009]) and (b) the traditional doctrine of inerrancy being based upon inductive-deductive methodology cannot be certain either. Anything beginning with inductive premises can only be probable.

Part 2

Induction

Chapter 2: Scripture's Self-attestation and Nature

In following the methodology presented in part 1, we begin part 2 by looking at what the whole Bible says (on a general level) about its authorship and origin, to identify what kind of a book it is, before proceeding to examine specific parts of it in depth. To do this, we will examine the whole of Scripture in three main sections. Firstly, the teaching of the Old Testament writers concerning what they wrote and its ultimate authorship (which will be compared with Jesus' view of Old Testament Scripture and then the apostles' and New Testament writers' perception of it). Secondly, the teaching of Jesus regarding his own words, (again followed by the New Testament author's view of them) and thirdly, the teaching of the apostles and New Testament writers on their writings and their ultimate authorship. Some systematic theologies prefer to do this in two sections, looking simply at Old Testament and New Testament teaching about itself for the obvious reason that Jesus' teaching (on Scripture) is contained within the writings of the New Testament and cannot be separated from that. But for the purposes of this thesis, it will be helpful to examine it in three blocks, to help readers who regard Jesus' words as a higher authority than the words of Scripture,⁷⁰ to see the consistency with which Jesus viewed his words with the same regard as any other words of Scripture.

⁷⁰ This has crept its way into more conservative theological circles as well (more on a popular level), a good example being the now published 'red/blue-letter' Bibles which have all Jesus' words written in red or blue ink to make them more distinguishable from the rest of Scripture. The thinking behind this is that, because they are Jesus' words, they are 'more important.' (Though this obviously misses the fact that Jesus primarily spoke in Aramaic so his words would have been translated and also interpreted by the gospel writers as was customary for the time [see chapter 4], and misses the point [to be argued later in this chapter] that Jesus saw his words on a level with all the other words of Scripture.)

Old Testament

The Old Testament view of itself

In the centuries before Christ came, the Old Testament teaches that God's spokespersons were the prophets. Particularly Jer 1:1-10 indicates that these people were God's mouthpiece(s), and they were given God's very words to speak. Perhaps the clearest verses (other than the verses above taken from Jeremiah) on the role of a prophet are those of Ex 4:10-16 and 7:1-4; Num 12:6-8; Dt 18:15-22; Hab 2:2-3 and the whole of Jeremiah chapter 36. All of these verses verify that the prophets were sent from God and had the authority to speak and write his words to, and for, the people. Therefore, it is not surprising to see throughout the Old Testament that God is often said to speak *through* a prophet: 1 Kgs 14:18; 16:12,34; 2 Kgs 9:36; 14:25; Jer 37:2; Zech 7:7,12.

It is also a regular occurrence to find that what a prophet spoke in God's name, God himself says⁷¹ (1 Kgs 13:26 with v.21; 1 Kgs 21:19; 2 Kgs 9:25-26; Hag 1:12). But what is particularly fascinating to discover, as Berkhof identifies, is that:

The prophetic word often begins by speaking of God in the third person, and then, without any indication of a transition, continues in the first person. The opening words are words of the prophet, and then all at once, without any preparation of the reader for a change, the human author simply disappears from view, and the divine author speaks apparently without any intermediary, Isa 19:1-2; Hos 4:1-6; 6:1-4; Mic 1:3-6; Zech 9:4-6; 12:8-9. Thus the word of the prophet passes into that of the Lord without any formal transition. The two are simply fused, and thus prove to be one.⁷²

Such freedom to interchange first and third person further suggests that the prophets saw themselves as speaking the direct word of God.

⁷¹ The tense here is deliberately present continuous because, as we shall see, God's words are eternal. (For what I mean by the 'eternal' nature of God's words, see Mt 5:17-18 and Lk 16:17 plus the comments on them in the later section of this chapter, as well as the fuller discussion in chapter 4.)

⁷² L. Berkhof, *Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932) p. 149. cited in R. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998) p.8.

Looking deeper into Old Testament language⁷³, the phrase ‘Thus says the LORD’ often appears. The authority of such a phrase has been highlighted by Grudem who has shown that this phrase would have been recognised as one identical in form to the phrase, ‘Thus says the king’ – a preface used by ancient kings to foreword an edict from himself to his subjects, one which could neither be challenged nor questioned but simply had to be obeyed.⁷⁴ Such an edict would be magnified in the words the biblical prophets were bringing, as they possessed even more authority, having been given words by the *divine* king. As a result of these authoritative words of God, if anyone disobeyed the words of a prophet, it was the same as disobeying God himself, which brought serious consequences: Dt 18:19; 1 Sam 10:8 with 13:13-14 and 15:3,9,23; 1 Kgs 20:35-36; Jer 36:27-31. A further indication of the authority and necessity of God’s words was that it was totally unacceptable for anyone to prophesy falsely - the importance of God’s words was paramount and, therefore, no false prophets were to be tolerated (Num 22:38; Dt 18:20; Jer 1:9; 14:14-16; 23:16-22; 29:31-32; Ezek 2:7; 13:1-16).

This very short overview of the Old Testament writers’ view of the origin of their words, demonstrates a strong unity throughout the Old Testament. The Old Testament views the words of its human authors as the very words of and from God. These words possessed his authority and were to be obeyed as if God himself had stood before his people and said those words.

⁷³ From now on, instead of speaking of what the prophets said, I shall speak of what the Old Testament says, as it is the written form of what the prophets said.

⁷⁴ W.Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation”, in *Scripture and Truth*, D.A.Carson and J.D.Woodbridge (eds.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) pp. 21-22.

Jesus' view of the Old Testament

Jesus' view of Old Testament Scripture proves very similar to the Old Testament writers'. Through reading the gospels, a picture can be built up of how he viewed Scripture,⁷⁵ a number of different factors indicating that he also thought of them as of divine origin.⁷⁶

Firstly, we find the use of metonymy in Jesus' words. Metonymy is a literary figure of speech in which the 'writer' may be interchanged for the 'thing written' or 'the written thing' for 'the writer'. (An example then would be 'Shakespeare says' could be used to mean 'the works of Shakespeare say' or 'Hamlet says' could be used to mean 'Shakespeare', as he expresses his mind in Hamlet 'says.'⁷⁷) Jesus uses this in Mt 19:4-5 where he refers to the words of Gen 2:24. The writer of Genesis presents 2:24-25 as his own mini sermon stemming from the story of the creation of Eve, so when quoting it one would expect Jesus to say "Scripture says ('for this reason a man will leave his father and mother...')", because these are not God's direct words in the sense that Gen 2:18 for example are, they are more the narrator's comment on the creation story. But in Mt 19:4-5, Jesus quotes Gen 2:24-25 and says, "*God the creator says* 'for this reason a man will leave his father and mother...'" giving a clear indication of God's ultimate authorship of Scripture. The freedom Jesus (and as we shall see, the apostles) felt to interchange the words 'God says' and 'Scripture says' indicates that he viewed synonymously what Scripture says, as what God says. When recognising Jesus' contentment to interchange 'God says' and 'Scripture says', we

⁷⁵ Obviously the only Scriptures Jesus had were the Old Testament, however, as will be seen, his reverence for those Scriptures give a good indication of how he would view any subsequent Scripture written after his ascension.

⁷⁶ In this thesis, I am assuming the divinity and omniscience of Jesus. In some ways it would have been helpful to give a chapter on how we know this to be the case because one of the very reasons Jesus' view of Scripture is appealed to is because of his identity as the Son of God, meaning that he was omniscient and knew the words of the Bible to be what he says they are. Unfortunately, however, space and scope of this paper will not allow a chapter of this content. For now, only a selection of evidence can be given (see the previous chapter and this chapter's section on Jesus' teaching of his own words).

⁷⁷ Taken from J. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (London: Tyndale Press, 1972) p.27 fn 8.

then see Jesus' acceptance of the Old Testament as the word of God further, where, although being aware of the human authorship of Old Testament writings (as we shall see below), he often attributes these writings to *God* as the ultimate author calling them Scripture, rather than simply attributing them to the human writers. To give just a few examples, Mt 21:42 / Lk 20:17 – the words of Psalm 118 are attributed as 'Scripture', Mt 26:63 – probably a selection of different human authors, all classified under 'Scripture' and Lk 4:21 – quoting from Isaiah, Jn 7:38 – an amalgamation of Is 55:1, Jer 2:13; 17:13 denoted as 'the Scripture says'.

Secondly, the reverse of the (immediately) above, is the way in which Jesus uses the human author's name to cite a particular part of Scripture (e.g. "Moses said" [Mk 7:10], "Well did Isaiah prophesy" [Mt 13:14; Mk 7:6], "David himself speaking by the Holy Spirit declared" [Mk 12:36]⁷⁸) when teaching, debating and dialoguing with those around him. As will become more evident in further sections, if God had not uttered the words of those Scriptures through Moses, Isaiah and David, they would simply be another set of words which could have been taken from any other human book and would not have held the clinical force they do in the context that Jesus cites them.⁷⁹

Connected with point two, thirdly, Jesus' confidence in the divine, authoritative authorship of Scripture is highlighted by his further use of it in his confrontations, particularly with the Pharisees and Sadducees. Throughout his ministry, Jesus settles these arguments / disputes with "Have you not read...?"⁸⁰ (Mt 12:3; 21:16; 22:31; Mk

⁷⁸ Mk 12:36 introduces us to the concept of inspiration, Jesus giving a hint of both the work of the human author and the ultimate authorship of God in the same Scripture: "David himself speaking by the Holy Spirit declared..." This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

⁷⁹ Pharisees would often cite the writings of other rabbis, scholars and scribes from the past to argue their point; but it is the lack of any response from those Jesus was speaking with - following the citing of a Scripture - that gives the indication of the citation's divine authority.

⁸⁰ Inferring that they really "should have read..." In fact, standard translations would do well to add an exclamation mark in here to show the force of what Jesus is saying.

12:10; Lk 10:26) i.e. “Don’t you know what God says...?” Therefore basically stating that those he was speaking to were falling into error because they did not know the Scriptures (Mk 7:9,13; 12:24), in turn implying that the Scriptures never err because they are of God.⁸¹ (This begins to introduce us to Jesus’ view of the inerrancy of Old Testament Scripture.⁸²) Reymond highlights that often Jesus’ choice of illustration / confirmation of his point is taken from those Old Testament events that prove least acceptable to critical scholars in the 21st century as factual history - his usage of the creation of man by direct act of God (Mt 19:4-5), the murder of Abel (Mt 23:35), Noah’s flood (Mt 24:37), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt 10:15; 11:23-24), the end of Lot’s wife (Lk 17:32) and the fish swallowing Jonah (Mt 12:40) are all examples of this and show that he regarded the Old Testament’s history as unimpeachable.⁸³

Fourthly, the above principle is amplified when the reader sees Jesus being tempted by Satan in the desert (Mt 4:1-11 / Lk 4:1-13). Here, Satan is deliberately manipulating Scripture in order to lead Jesus astray and shows an insubordination to the Scripture by not taking *God’s* meaning from it, but twisting it to suit *his own* purposes.⁸⁴ Jesus knows what is happening and by way of both response and rebuke (Eph 6:17) states 3 times γέγραπται... (“it is written...”, or a closer translation being “it stands written...”, an indication of the everlasting nature of the authoritative

⁸¹ It is often alleged that Jesus disagrees with the Pharisees *use* of scripture. In response it should be asked what is meant by the word ‘use’. If it refers to *interpretation*, then it is clear that Jesus certainly does disagree with them in that they do not understand Scripture because they do not see that it all points to, and is fulfilled, in him. But, if by ‘use’ it is meant, ‘use as a basis of authority’ then that is mistaken. Jesus never denounces anyone for their appeal to Scripture.

Sometimes, the above has been taken issue with by quoting Jesus’ teaching on subjects such as the Sabbath, cleansing all foods, divorce, or his ‘but I say to you’ sayings. But these are misunderstandings of what he is saying and are responded to comprehensively in Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, pp.36-44.

⁸² This will also be particularly relevant and analysed further in following chapters (chapters 4, 5 and 6) but is worth noting here that Jesus would (as would any 1st century rabbi) have known about the apparently conflicting accounts of Kings and Chronicles (e.g. 1 Kgs 4:26 and 2 Chron 9:25 or 1 Kgs 16:6 and 2 Chron 16:1), yet he still implies they are inerrant.

⁸³ Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, p.45.

⁸⁴ This will be particularly relevant when it comes to the chapter on the meaning of inerrancy.

words of God⁸⁵) and quotes Scripture in its right context with God's true intended meaning to rebut Satan's temptations.

The above four points, when summarised, strongly imply that Jesus saw 'God' speaking and 'Scripture' speaking as synonymous, he recognised the human words of the Old Testament as ultimately being authored by God, and, being the words of God, he therefore viewed the Old Testament Scriptures as being authoritative. However, some might want to contest this arguing that it is only the particular verses cited above that Jesus viewed as being of divine origin. So to complete this survey of Jesus' view of the Old Testament, we will look at a few verses that confirm his teaching that the whole of the Old Testament was from God.

The Hebrew Bible was laid out differently to the Christian Old Testament, it being grouped together in three sections: law, the prophets, and the writings (as opposed to law, history, wisdom literature and major then minor prophets that we have in the Christian Old Testament). So for an alternative way of speaking of the whole Old Testament, Jews would speak of the "law, the prophets and the writings" (Lk 24:44⁸⁶), which in some cases was just shortened to 'the law and the prophets'. So when he was teaching, Jesus too appealed to the authority of the whole Old Testament in this way (Mt 7:11-12 and 22:39-41). To substantiate further that Jesus saw the whole Old Testament as Scripture, his (perhaps most famous) teachings on the whole of the Old Testament are Mt 5:17-18, Lk 16:17 and Jn 10:35 which are worth quoting in full as they speak for themselves and clearly show his understanding of their origins and eternal status: Mt 5:17-18 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the

⁸⁵ As is seen in chapter 4, God's words claim to be everlasting e.g. Isa 40:8; Mt 5:18, 24:35; Lk 16:17; 1 Pt 1:24-25.

⁸⁶ Note: This verse does not say exactly the "law, prophets and the writings". Jesus quotes 'psalms' rather than 'writings' because in the Jewish Old Testament, the psalms were placed first in 'the writings'. This position, plus the length of them then meant they became representative of the whole of the writings, so a synonymous way of speaking of the law, the prophets and the writings was to say as Jesus does "law, the prophets and the psalms".

Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” Lk 16:17 “It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.” Jn 10:35⁸⁷ “...if he called them ‘gods’ to whom the word of God came – *and the scripture cannot be broken* - ...”⁸⁸

All the above puts forward a considerable amount of evidence that Jesus regarded the Old Testament Scriptures in the same way as the Old Testament writers, as the authoritative words of God. As a result, his own teaching is saturated with reference and allusion to it (only a few of the hundreds of examples will be given: Mk 4:29 recalling Joel 3:13, Mt 7:23 and Lk 13:27 from Ps 6:8, Mt 18:15-20 from Dt 19:15, Lk 19:44 from Ps 137, though any brief look at the Sermon on the Mount, or any of Jesus’ teaching would reveal this), and he was quick to reprimand his own disciples and the Pharisees for not believing all that was written – see particularly the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:25).

To conclude this sub-section, it is helpful to think of Jesus in his prophetic role in relation to the Old Testament prophets. He was sent from God, to speak God’s words and to remind people of God’s previous words and how they were to be applied. Vos’ citation brings a helpful summary:

⁸⁷ Warfield corrects the objection that Jesus’ appeal to Scripture is one that is *ad hominem* - that his words express not his own view of the authority of Scripture but that of his Jewish opponents – as an argument that is *e concessu* – Scripture was common ground for Jesus and his opponents. B.B.Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. S.Craig (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1959) p.140. See also fn.81.

⁸⁸ Morris comments “The term ‘broken’ is not defined, and it is a word which is not often used of Scripture and the like...but it is perfectly intelligible. It means that Scripture cannot be emptied of its force by being shown to be erroneous.” (L.Morris, *The Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] p.527.) Henry states, “Not only does Jesus adduce what is written in Scripture as law, but explicitly adds: ‘and the scripture cannot be broken.’ He attaches divine authority to Scripture as an inviolable whole. The authority of Scripture, he avers, cannot be undone or annulled, for it is indestructible.” C.F.H.Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: God who speaks and shows*, vol. 4 (Waco: Word Books, 1979) p.133.

He once more made the voice of the law the voice of the living God, who is present in every commandment, so absolute in his demands, so personally interested in man's conduct, so all-observant, that the thought of yielding to him less than the inner life, the heart, the soul, the mind, the strength, can no longer be tolerated. Thus quickened by the Spirit of God's personality the law becomes in our Lord's hands a living organism, in which soul and body, spirit and letter, the greater and smaller commandments are to be distinguished, and which admits of being reduced to great comprehensive principles in whose light the weight and purport of all single precepts are to be intelligently appreciated.⁸⁹

The apostles' and New Testament writers' view of the Old Testament

When we come to the apostles' and New Testament understanding of the Old Testament's origin, it is not surprising (as it is written by Jesus' followers) that we find Jesus' view of it very similarly advocated. Again, the use of metonymy appears in the New Testament writings, except more of it, and from both angles (Scripture spoken of as God, and God as Scripture). Rom 9:17 says that "the *Scripture* says to Pharaoh 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth'", when actually *God* spoke those words in Ex 9:16; again Gal 3:8 cites the *Scripture* as foreseeing "that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you'" – something that *God himself* said directly to Abraham in Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18. It appears the other way round (as we saw when Jesus used the device in Mt 19:4-5) in Heb 1:6-10 which says "...when *God* brings his firstborn into the world *he says...*" – the following verses being a string of quotations from *Scripture* (Dt 32:43 [see dead sea scrolls and Septuagint]; Ps 104:4; Ps 45:6-7). Again this arises in Heb 3:7, but this time, "the Holy Spirit says..." is cited as opposed to "Scripture" in Ps 95:7-11. So there is a freedom throughout the New Testament for the apostles and New Testament writers to interchange 'God says'

⁸⁹ G.Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) p.61.

and ‘Scripture says’, showing the understanding that God authored the Old Testament Scriptures.

Again, like Jesus, it becomes apparent that the apostles and New Testament writers also recognised the human authorship of Old Testament writings, yet deliberately attributed those writings to God - Acts 1:16; 4:24-25; Rom 9:25; as well as constantly appealing to the Old Testament to prove a point (Jn 12:40; Acts 7; 13:35; 28:26; Rom 4:6; 11:8; 14:11; 1 Cor 9:8-10; Jas 2:21-25; 1 Pt 1:24 etc.). Their sermons too are also drenched with Old Testament references (see particularly Acts, but any New Testament book after that could be quoted).

However, as well as the above, (which are just a re-emphasising of some of the arguments for Jesus’ view), Paul’s describing of the Old Testament in two particular phrases is telling. Firstly, in Rom 1:2-3 (where he is giving a summary of the gospel he was preaching) he says this gospel is, “regarding his Son” (v.3) whom God “promised beforehand through his prophets in the *Holy* Scriptures” (v.2). Paul’s use of the word, “Holy”, points to the special origin of Scripture as from the Holy God. He also speaks of the Jews as having “been entrusted with the very words of God” (Rom 3:2), or as some translate τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ “the oracles / divine utterances of God” (see also Acts 7:38 – “living words passed to pass onto us”; Heb 5:12; 1 Pt 4:11⁹⁰), both phrases strongly hinting at the fact that the Old Testament was the word of God.

So again in the New Testament, *all* of the Old Testament words are said be from God and therefore compel belief (Acts 3:18-19; 24:14-16; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:1-11; 2 Tim 3:15-17; Heb 3:7-8).

⁹⁰ Brueggemann helpfully muses that “The Bible is... ‘the live word of the living God’” (*The Book That Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) p.20.

Jesus' view of his own words

Having established that the Bible consistently speaks of the Old Testament as being the words of God, we come onto Jesus' view of his own words. Wright contends that Jesus understood everything in the Old Testament as pointing to him. He colourfully describes Jesus as accomplishing and fulfilling "an entire world of hints and shadows" which came to "plain statement and full light" in him.⁹¹ Such a summary is insightful because it highlights that Jesus was not only the fulfilment of certain prophecies about him, but was the antitype of everything in the Old Testament, a conclusion supported by 2 Cor 1:19-20: "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy was not 'Yes' and 'No', but in him it has always been 'Yes'. For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ..." This is supported further in Lk 24:44. Being aware that he was the fulfilment of everything that was written in the Old Testament Scriptures, Jesus was also very conscious of the predestined work that the Scripture had laid out before him (Mt 26:21, 53-56; Mk 9:12,13; 14:27; Lk 4:21; 7:27; 18:31-33). A few of the clearest verses are again Mt 5:17-18 and Lk 24:25-27, 44-47, and, relating to his mission of the cross, Mk 8:31: "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man *must* suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." The 'must' showing the predestined path he was to take. All this is why Jesus in Jn 5:39 can say that "the Scriptures...are the Scriptures that testify to me," because he knew he was the fulfilment of them, the promised Messiah, the king, the prophet, the Son of God who was coming into the world to do the work that was mapped out for him to do.

⁹¹ N.T.Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005) p.32. Wright sees this particularly as Matthew's emphasis from chapter 5:17 through to 18:38.

Bearing all the above in mind, it would be expected to see Jesus speaking authoritative words of God himself, something which we do in fact find. In line with what was seen above with the word γέγραπται, Jesus (having already mentioned the fact that he was a / the prophet) states emphatically, Mk 13:31 / 21:33: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” This powerful declaration, which puts his words in line with the authority of the Old Testament, is also supported by his claim to speak the very truth, often marked by his preface to his teaching, “I tell you the truth” or “Amen amen I say unto you” (Jn 1:51; 3:3; 3:5; 3:11; 5:19; 5:24, 25; 16:23; 21:18).

Further indications of the power of his words come in his warning that, “if anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with his holy angels”, as well as his statement that it is the wise man who builds his house upon the rock of his (Jesus’) words (Mt 7:24-26 and Lk 6:46-49).

All this leads to a very clear portrayal of who Jesus is and the authority of his words. It can be neatly summarised by the great commission: “Then Jesus came to them and said ‘all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you to the very end of the age.’” (Mt 28:18-20)

The apostles’ and other New Testament writers’ view of Jesus’ words

Jesus’ followers and the Early Church also perceived Jesus’ words in the authoritative manner outlined above, and so, in obedience to the great commission, the apostles did

go out and spread the words of Jesus, preaching the gospel. This does not need to be elaborated upon, except to say that any opportunity they had to speak and quote Jesus' words, they took. (See as an example 1 Corinthians where Paul quotes Jesus as much as possible on issues that were coming up in Corinth [1 Cor 7:10-11, cf. 7:12, 25] and also the 'historical sayings' of Jesus – sayings not recorded in the gospels [as they did not serve the purposes of the evangelists] but which the apostles passed on, e.g. 1 Thess 4:15).

The continuity of Jesus' words with those of the Old Testament is captured in 2 Pt 3:2, Peter saying: "I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles."

The New Testament and apostles' view of their own writings

Finally, we turn to the New Testament understanding of itself. It should be clear from the above that the Old Testament was unfinished, i.e. it was looking forward to the coming of God's Messiah to save and redeem his people. When Jesus came, he arrived as the fulfiller of all those promises. So it would be very surprising had he not authorised the concluding chapters, the resolution, and the completion of the story. As already seen, he sent out his apostles (literally 'sent ones') to tell of what had been fulfilled among them (Lk 1:1; Acts 1:8; Mt 28:18-20) just before he ascended. This was one of the very reasons that Jesus chose them in the first place, because knowing that his work was only for a limited time and in a limited space, he chose them to carry on the work by the power of his Holy Spirit. In the gospels, the reader sees them in the training process when Jesus sends them out (e.g. Mt 10) where they were to be his ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20), but he also tells them of a time in which they would be without him, but would carry on his witness throughout the world (Mt 10:19 / Mk

13:11; Lk 12:12; Jn 15:26), and he prays for them for that time (Jn 17:6-19). They are also promised the Holy Spirit to help and guide them, Jn 14:26: “But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” Again, Jn 16:12-13: “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” So, like the Old Testament prophets, the apostles went out and obeyed their commission and spoke and wrote the words of God wherever and whenever they got the chance (the book of Acts – see for example 2:42-47; 5:32; 6:2).⁹²

Therefore, when considering the writings of the New Testament, again, there are claims made to be writing (and to have spoken) the words of God. With regards to how much of the New Testament he wrote, and the constant battle to defend his authority, most of these are found in Paul’s letters (1 Cor 2:6-13; 2 Cor 13:3; Gal 1:11-2:21; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 3:4-14), but there are also examples in Peter’s and John’s writings (1 Pt 1:10-12; 1 Jn 4:6; 3 Jn 9).

There is also in the New Testament, an awareness of the growing corpus of apostolic or apostolically endorsed Scripture. Paul says in 1 Tim 5:18 that “the Scripture says ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain’ and ‘the worker deserves his wages.’” The first reference being to Dt 25:4, but the second to Luke 10:7. Peter also displays this awareness in 2 Pt 3:15-16: “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with wisdom

⁹² It might be objected at this point that Paul, who wrote the majority of the New Testament, was not part of that original eleven (that then became twelve [Acts 1:15-26]). This is true, and Paul himself admits that Jesus’ appearance to himself, and his calling to be an apostle, was “as to one abnormally born” (1 Cor 15:8). That being said, it was still a genuine appearance and commission to be a genuine apostle (Acts 26:17 and 22:21) (as was accepted by the 12 [Gal 2:1-10]) – something which he constantly had to defend in his letters (Rom 1:1-6; 2 Cor 11:1-15; Gal 1:11-2:21; Col 1:24-2:5, etc. as well as the opening of all his letters).

that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do *the other Scriptures*, to their own destruction.” Here, Peter is including Paul’s letters with what he regards as Scripture. In which case, it is fair to say that Paul (as we saw earlier understanding this growing body of apostolic writings) would be happy to include the New Testament Scriptures in his statements about Scripture when he wrote to Timothy for the second time. Speaking of the Scriptures he says they “...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16)

All of this points to the fact the apostles (and the Early New Testament Church Lk 1:1-4⁹³) regarded the writings of the New Testament as the authoritative words of God in continuation with the words of the Old Testament and Jesus’ words.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, certain words and phrases have recurred continually. Again and again, ‘God’s words’, ‘authority’ and ‘authorship’ have emerged from each section. This is because in all Scripture, Old Testament and New (including Jesus’ words), there is a consistent unity that binds it all together – the ultimate authorship of God which also reveals a real authority in his words.⁹⁴ It may have been noticed that I

⁹³ This could be yet another section, this time confirming the New Testament writings by way of the historical writings of the Early Church Fathers. However, as the subject of this chapter is Scripture’s self-attestation and nature, it has been left out.

⁹⁴ Wright’s thesis of his book, *Scripture and The Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005), illumines the authority of Scripture further when he argues “the phrase ‘authority of scripture’...make[s] Christian sense if it is a shorthand for ‘the authority of the triune God, exercised...through scripture.’” (p. 17)

The direct identification between the writings of Scripture and the word of God is known as verbal inspiration. Writings are made up of words, therefore verbal inspiration is a natural conclusion to draw

have now categorised Jesus' words with the words of the New Testament, the point having been made that though Jesus' words are from God, they are no more from God than any other words in the Old or New Testament. They are all from God. Therefore, it is important when thinking about the Bible that we think of it as that unity – as one book, not just sixty six different ones which, for example, only give us differing and conflicting understandings of Israel's history or ethics in the Early Church.⁹⁵

As well as seeing the divine authorship, authority and unity, some of Scripture's nature has also begun to be uncovered. We have begun to see what the Bible says about its own inerrancy, its necessity, and a little about its inspiration. The attributes have not really been mined (there has been no mention of clarity or sufficiency for example) as this thesis is not intended to be a systematic theology of God's word. However, it does demonstrate the interconnectedness of all these, again pointing to the unity of Scripture but also its interconnectedness with other doctrines such as the doctrine of God. However, to pursue inerrancy (as is the aim of this thesis), we cannot go down these paths and examine these connected attributes in detail, we must now begin to focus more specifically on our subject and only those areas immediately related to this topic.

from what has been seen in this chapter. As will be seen later, verbal inspiration (sometimes referred to as 'propositional revelation' [though for reasons that will become obvious later, I favour the former]) is sometimes rejected on the assumption that the vehicle of human language would be one impossible for God to use to communicate with his creation. Behind this reluctance to accept verbal inspiration often lie worldviews different from that of Christian theism which do not allow for God to be a speaking God, but as shown above, this is inconsistent with Scripture's self-witness. Indeed, this is the precise sense – use of human language – that God *has* spoken to tell man things. As the writer to the Hebrews states "In the past, God *spoke* to our forefathers at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has *spoken* to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1-2 emphasis mine) The writer then goes on to argue that because of the supremacy of Christ, the reader should listen even more carefully to the message of salvation that he and his apostles declared (Heb 2:1-3), and in the rest of the letter expounds and applies the words of the Old Testament - fulfilled in Christ - to his readers (1:5-13; 2:11-13; 3:7-11; 5:5ff; 8:3-12; 9:8; 10:5-9, 15-17, 30, 37ff; 12:26; 13:5), demonstrating what he means by God speaking in many ways.

⁹⁵ To clarify, I am not denying the individuality of the 66 books that make up God's one book, but I am denying that these 66 books have no common authorship and relation to one another.

Chapter 3: Warfield's Doctrine of the 'Inspiration' of Scripture

In the previous chapter, it was argued that Scripture's own view of its ultimate authorship is that it is from God. This conclusion was arrived at following a general (inductive) look at Scripture's self-attestation. However, building upon this general investigation, closer work now needs to be done on a specific few of these verses to enable us to establish how it is that God's words came to be written down, written in the words of men. To do so steers us into the area of 'inspiration'.

It may raise a few eyebrows to see that the word 'inspiration' has been put in inverted commas in the title. The reason for this will become clearer as we go on, but for introductory purposes, attention needs to be drawn to the vast amount of writing done on this subject under the umbrella of the word 'inspiration' to give some preliminary justification for using inverted commas. At the turn of the 19th / 20th Century, Warfield wrote an article on 'inspiration'. From then to the end of his life, the majority of his writing career was taken up with this subject and in fact his very last paper was on 'inspiration' as well - Warfield was probably the most prolific writer ever on this subject. But since Warfield, a whole plethora of writing has emerged - all on the subject 'inspiration', and the debate as to how exactly Scripture is 'inspired' has been pulsating ever since on both the Protestant and Catholic sides of the Church. Though Warfield's view still predominates as the Protestant Orthodox view, many other definitions have been given, and the diversity of those definitions is noteworthy. A few of the most influential have been quoted / paraphrased below

Warfield: The Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed on them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979) p.173.

Barr: Today I think we believe, or have to believe, that God's communication with the men of the biblical period was not on any different terms from the mode of his communication with people today.⁹⁷

Abraham: [God] inspires in, with, and through his special revelatory acts and through his personal guidance of those who wrote and put together the various parts of the Bible.⁹⁸ (A teacher would be a good example as s/he 'inspires' his/her pupils by a range of stimulus such as asking questions, lecturing, modelling etc.)

Jensen, when speaking of the Bible's inspiration, asserted, "When Christian scholars doubt the existence of the inspired canon, they doubt the very foundation of their own faith."⁹⁹ Such a statement alerts us to the importance of the debate hinting that implications are far reaching, but also implies that 'inspiration' is potentially a difficult issue which needs very careful study. So before entering, or rather as a way into the debate, it would be wise to take heed of Burtchaell's observation and caution:

Most inspiration theory has not been talk about the Bible. It has been talk about talk about the Bible. Rather than examine the Book itself...they have preferred to erect elaborate and risky constructs of formula upon formula." [...We need...] "...to scrutinise the Bible to see what it shows of its own nature and origins... How despite our preconceptions, has inspiration really worked?¹⁰⁰

Scripture's claims about its origins have already been looked at (in chapter 2), but we must too see what it says of its own 'inspiration'. So in this chapter, the subject of 'inspiration' shall be analysed using Warfield's structure, beginning with what Scripture says about itself in terms of its final *product*, and then looking at Warfield's theory and some hints Scripture gives us about the *process* of how that final product came to be. After this, reflection on where Warfield's work could be improved will be

⁹⁷ J.Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1973) pp.17-18.

⁹⁸ W.J.Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) p.67.

⁹⁹ P.Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2002) p.186.

¹⁰⁰ J.T.Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969) pp.283-4.

offered, followed by engagement with some of the other definitions of inspiration presented above. Then, finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

Product – 2 Timothy 3:16

The first verse to be brought into discussion is usually 2 Tim 3:16 (especially by conservative theologians). This verse was touched upon in chapter 2, but as will become apparent, it is one of the key verses concerning ‘inspiration’, and solid exegesis of it is absolutely vital. However, such exegesis is not as straight forward as it may at first sound, as becomes obvious from a superficial glance at the numerous modern day translations of the verse.¹⁰¹

The context of 2 Tim 3:16 is that of Paul¹⁰² having written to Timothy to encourage him to “*continue in what you have learned*” (3:14). For Timothy to do so (in the difficult circumstances he is in in Ephesus), means learning from the pattern that Paul gave him (v.10-15), and also reflecting upon the Scripture he has known from infancy (v.15-17). Verse 16 tells Timothy exactly what that Scripture is and its effects. But the first four words of the verse *πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος καὶ...* can all be translated in slightly different ways, but ways which (on the whole¹⁰³) heavily affect the meaning of the verse.

¹⁰¹ An exhaustive list and comparison of how all the modern Bibles translate 2 Tim 3:16 can be found at Kevin Davnet, (no date) *Which Bible Translation?* Available: <http://kevin.davnet.org/articles/bibletrans.html> (accessed 31st August 2006). I do not endorse everything that Davnet says on that page - though of particular amusement (because of the irony) might be the way “The ‘Inspired’ Version” translates it.

¹⁰² It is often objected that Paul (and when we come onto 2 Peter – Peter) did not actually write this letter. However, even if this were true (though see G.W.Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992] and P.H.Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* [Leicester: Apollos, 2006] for a defence of Pauline and Petrine authorship), Howard Marshall makes the point that for our purposes, it does not really matter whether or not Paul (and Peter for 2 Pt 1:21) wrote this letter – all that we are looking for are statements in the New Testament about Scripture’s inspiration. Whether or not Paul and Peter wrote these letters, they still represent statements by early Christians showing how they regarded Scripture. (I.Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* [London, Sydney, Auckland, Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982] p.25.)

¹⁰³ The exception being the word *πᾶσα* – see following exegesis.

Firstly, πᾶσα can either be translated “all” (NASB, ESV, NKJV, RSV, NRV, NIV) or “every” (ASV, NEB), the difference being whether Paul is referring collectively to Scripture (cf. Gal 3:8) or to particular passages of Scripture (cf. Acts 8:35). Though this word is probably the hardest to come to a decision on (should it be “every” on the grounds that the article for γραφή is missing? Or how much should it be taken into account that πᾶς is sometimes used analogously in a technical or semi-technical phrase where “every” cannot possibly be meant [Acts 2:36; Eph 2:21; 3:15; Col 4:12]?¹⁰⁴), it does not actually matter because as has already been seen, *any* Scripture is from God, so whether it is “every” or “all”, it does not affect the verse’s meaning. To come to a decision though, the fact that Paul in the previous verse speaks about Scripture in general and no specific verse is given would imply that “all” is a better translation¹⁰⁵ (The fact that the majority of modern Bible versions translate “all” would also add weight to this).

Secondly, the next word – γραφή (“Scripture”) – both Simpson and Pannenburg have argued, can only refer to the Old Testament rather than to the whole of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments.¹⁰⁶ A weaker suggestion is that it simply means “writing”.¹⁰⁷ The latter opinion is refuted by lexical work tracing the word γραφή through the New Testament. It is used over fifty times (e.g. Jn 2:22; 10:35; 20:9; Acts 8:32; Rom 4:3; 9:17; 11:2; Gal 3:8, 22; 4:30; 1 Tim 5:18; Jas 4:4; 1 Pt 2:6; 2 Pt 1:20) and every time to refer to sacred Scripture – the consensus being that the word had

¹⁰⁴ See arguments in Paul Feinburg’s article “The Meaning of Inerrancy” in *Inerrancy*, N.Geisler (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) p.277 or Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p.446.

¹⁰⁵ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p.446.

¹⁰⁶ W.Pannenburg, ‘Theological table talk: On the Inspiration of Scripture’ *Theology Today* 54 (1997) 212, and Simpson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Tyndale Press, 1954) pp.150-151. Both then argue that the phrases ἱερὰ γράμματα and πᾶσα γραφή are synonymous.

¹⁰⁷ Such a suggestion is usually advanced on non-scholarly websites with little understanding of the etymology.

become a *terminus technicus* for Holy Scripture.¹⁰⁸ The argument that it refers only to the Old Testament has a lot more weight and is based on the detail that the “Holy Scriptures” (ἱερὰ γράμματα) which Timothy knew from infancy, had to have been the Old Testament because the New Testament had not been completed. So, accordingly, he would not have been able to know these Scriptures from birth. This might be a good argument if the word for Scripture in both verses 15 and 16 were the same, but note the change in phrasing from ἱερὰ γράμματα (v.15) to πᾶσα γραφή (v.16). To help us see why Paul changes the word, Knight points again to the context of the verse - the context of the rest of the letter, but also of Paul’s wider ministry too:

Paul insisted that his letters be read (1 Thess 5:27), exchanged (Col 4:16), and obeyed (e.g. 1 Cor 14:37; 2 Thess 2:15), and identified the words he used to communicate the gospel message as ‘those taught by the Spirit’ (1 Cor 2:13). In this letter Paul has praised Timothy for following his teaching (v.10), has urged Timothy to continue in what he has learned from Paul (v.14), has commanded Timothy to retain ‘the standard of sound words’ that he has heard from Paul (1:13), has commanded him to entrust what he has heard from Paul to faithful men so that they could teach others (2:2), and has insisted that Timothy handle accurately the ‘word of truth’ (2:15). After his remarks on πᾶσα γραφή he will urge Timothy to ‘preach the word’ (4:2), i.e. proclaim the apostolic message about which Paul has said so much in this letter.¹⁰⁹

Remembering this context, plus the growing realisation that more Scripture was being written at the time of the apostles (1 Tim 5:18; 2 Pt 3:16 [see my chapter 2]), would seem to lean towards the understanding that Paul’s use of πᾶσα γραφή is an

¹⁰⁸ See Feinburg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy”, p.277, BAGD p.165 s.v.2, TDNT vol. 1. pp.751ff, as well as I.Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999) p.792 and W.D.Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000) pp.565-566.

¹⁰⁹ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p.448.

enlargement upon the Old Testament ἱερὰ γράμματα of verse 15, namely to that which would include New Testament writings as well.¹¹⁰

Thirdly, the word θεὸπνευστος causes differences of opinion. This word is central for our understanding of the verse (and indeed for our whole discussion on ‘inspiration’). To understand it properly, there are three major questions that need to be answered. The first two have to be asked together (a) Does the word θεὸπνευστος mean “inspired” (NASB, NKJV, ASV, RSV), or “God-breathed” [NIV, ESV]? And once that is established, (b) is θεὸπνευστος passive as translated in the line above, or active (“inspiring” / [active of God-breathed does not really work])? This is where the reasoning behind putting ‘inspiration’ in inverted commas begins to become clearer. Addressing (a), the idea that all Scripture is ‘inspired’ comes from the Latin Vulgate translation of 2 Tim 3:16 *Omnis scriptura divinitus inspirata*. However, the root words of θεὸπνευστος are θεὸς (“God”) and πνεω (“to breathe”) and have nothing to do with *inspiration*. Warfield, the champion of this θεὸπνευστος philology¹¹¹ showed that as well as it being nothing to do with *inspiration*, he answered (b) too by undertaking a survey of eighty-six adjectives ending in τος and showed that the overwhelming majority are passive, meaning that rather than the Scripture being “inspiring”¹¹² - something to do with the reader, it is to do with the Scripture itself – Scripture is θεὸπνευστος – “God-breathed”.¹¹³ This distinction between “inspired”

¹¹⁰ See also Spicq (*Les Epitres Pastorales* [Etudes Bibliques Paris: J.Gabolda, 1969] p.787 and Hendriksen (*New Testament Commentary; Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* [London: Banner of Truth, 1959] pp.300-302) who draw a similar conclusion.

¹¹¹ Knight notes that Warfield’s study of θεὸπνευστος (as passive) has been so extensive, that the BAGD Lexicon lists only his research in its bibliographic notes for the word.

¹¹² “Inspiring” here is the only example that could be used because as was demonstrated above, there cannot be an active of “God-breathed”.

¹¹³ B.B.Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), pp.281-83.

and “God-breathed”¹¹⁴ cannot be emphasised enough. Carl Henry helpfully establishes the implications of the distinction when he writes:

There is a marked difference between the notion that God ‘breathed into’ the biblical writings [i.e. they are *inspired*], and the biblical declaration that God ‘breathed out’ the writings; the former merely *approximates* the Scriptures to revelation, whereas the latter *identifies* Scripture with revelation.¹¹⁵

Henry’s conclusion is astute because it maintains the distinction between product and process. Something that is breathed out / spoken is the finished product and can, therefore, (if it is *God-breathed*) be directly equated and identified with pure revelation. However, something that is inspired may have had God’s influence in its process, but whatever comes out (the finished product) can only then be approximated to revelation because there will have been other factors involved as well which dilute God’s revelatory aspect.

So the first two difficulties over translation and the active / passive voice are resolved as θεὸπνευστος meaning “God-breathed”, Towner’s and Carson’s conclusions bring forth further clarification:

God’s activity of ‘breathing’ and the human activity of writing are in some sense complimentary¹¹⁶

θεὸπνευστος is explicitly tied by the pastoral letters to the text of Scripture, to the γραφή not to the process.¹¹⁷

The third question to do with θεὸπνευστος is whether as an adjective it is attributive (“All God-breathed Scripture is useful...” [ASV, REB, NEB]) or predicative (“All Scripture is God-breathed...” [NIV, ESV]). This is again to do with

¹¹⁴ The author considered referring to this as *expired* by God as opposed to *inspired*, however, expiration has come to mean something quite different in modern day English so would confuse the discussion.

¹¹⁵ C.F.H.Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: God who speaks and shows*, vol.4 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1979) p.133 (emphasis mine).

¹¹⁶ P.H.Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) p.589.

¹¹⁷ D.A.Carson, ‘Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review’, *TJ* 27.1 (2006) 12.

translation, the question being how one translates καὶ – is it “All God-breathed Scripture is *also* profitable...” or “All Scripture is God-breathed *and* useful...”?

Feinburg’s research of the language (drawing upon Miller on points 3 and 5¹¹⁸) gives five reasons why it is predicative. (1) In the absence of a verb, it is natural to interpret the two adjectives θεὸπνευστος and ὠφέλιμος (“profitable”) in the same manner; (2) The construction of 2 Tim 3:16 is exactly the same as 1 Tim 4:4 where the two adjectives are predicative; (3) In an attributive construction we would expect the adjective (θεὸπνευστος) to appear *before* γραφή; (4) Words joined by καὶ are usually understood as linked by this conjunction and (5) θεὸπνευστος being in the attributive might leave open the idea that some “Scripture” is not God-breathed, an idea that Knight remarks would be incredible looking at all of Paul’s other uses of the word γραφή in the New Testament.¹¹⁹ A sixth reason relating to καὶ could also be added, in that it would not be a necessary addition to the sentence if θεὸπνευστος were attributive – “All God-breathed Scripture is also useful...” Knight suggests that the sentence would flow more smoothly if it was not there.¹²⁰ So Warfield’s conclusion is justified:

From all points of approach alike we appear to be conducted to the conclusion that it [θεὸπνευστος] is primarily expressive of the origination of Scripture, not of its nature and much less its effects.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ L. Miller, ‘Plenary Inspiration and 2 Tim 3:16,’ *Lutheran Quarterly*, XVII (February 1965) 59.

¹¹⁹ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p.447; cf. Feinburg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy”, p.279.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.448.

¹²¹ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, (1948) p.296. Mounce concludes very similarly θεὸπνευστος denotes not the manner of the inspiration of Scripture but rather its source.” (*Pastoral Epistles*, p.566). However this conclusion does leave room in a secondary sense for Reymond’s observation that when Paul labelled the Scriptures as ‘theopneustic’ i.e. being of the character of the very ‘breath of God, breathed out’ he was stating something about its nature. “Just as God’s ‘breath’ (his word) created all the host of heaven (Ps 33:6), just as his ‘breath’ gave physical life to Adam and to all mankind (Gen 2:7; Job 33:4), just as his ‘breath’ gave spiritual life to Israel, the ‘valley of dry bones’ (Ezek 37:1-14), so also his powerful, creative ‘breath’ in its word form, is living and active (Heb 4:12), imperishable and abiding (1 Pt 1:23) and through it God’s Spirit imparts new life to the soul.” (Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, p.36).

This leaves either the NIV or the ESV's translation as the correct one of the vital first section of 2 Tim 3:16:¹²² "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

As has already been said, solid detailed exegesis of 2 Tim 3:16 is vital because it is one of the keys to forming a good doctrine of 'inspiration'. A number of more recent critiques of the orthodox / Warfield's understanding of 'inspiration' have shown weakness particularly on this point. Barr, seeing that there are many translations (he quotes the AV and NEB in his work), does not really begin to engage with the conservative exegesis of this work:

It is an open question which books or documents were included within 'scripture' by the writer of 2 Timothy, and an open question also what was implied in his mind by 'inspired', what it involved and what it excluded.¹²³

Barr simply asserts when referring to 'Scriptural evidences' used by fundamentalists¹²⁴ that "the texts do not mean what fundamentalist apologists have taken them to mean."¹²⁵ But no critical work or alternative meaning is given to make us believe what he says. Abraham, confident that γράφῃ refers to the Septuagint writings accessible to Timothy, remarks that how we translate the opening of 2 Tim 3:16 is an "irrelevant issue," because all that can be said of it is that Scripture is "inspired".¹²⁶ Trembath's handling of 2 Tim 3:16 is also inadequate, claiming as he does that no-one actually knows what it means - it being a hapax legomenon, and again remains agnostic as to what the word γράφῃ means.¹²⁷ Achtemeier does a little

¹²² Though the ESV's "profitable" is slightly stronger and a better translation than the NIV's "useful", the ESV rendering, "breathed out by God" in my view is a bit of an over-translation and slightly awkward so the NIV will be retained here.

¹²³ Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World*, p.14.

¹²⁴ By 'fundamentalists' Barr is referring to Evangelicals.

¹²⁵ J.Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977) p.xviii.

¹²⁶ Abraham, *Divine Inspiration* p.93.

¹²⁷ K.R.Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* (New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) p.6.

better, however, though he recognises that the literal meaning of θεὸπνευστος is “God-breathed”, he only gives two possible translations of this verse being, “All inspired Scripture is also...” or “All Scripture is inspired and...” in an attempt to keep the verse about *inspiration*.¹²⁸

The lack of critical exegesis behind these alternative view points renders them weak when compared with that done by Warfield and later theologians (Packer, Henry, Lewis, Feinburg, Knight etc.), but they again serve to demonstrate that unless you start with a good understanding of 2 Tim 3:16, it skews your understanding of ‘inspiration’.

Before moving on, it is worth showing some of the implications of our exegesis of 2 Tim 3:16. (1) When looking at this verse, we must conclude with Warfield that “The *Scriptures* are a divine *product*, without any indication of how God has operated in producing them.”¹²⁹ So “God-breathed” (or if the word “inspired” is to be retained) is something to do with *the Scripture itself not the writers of Scripture*. (2) As a response to the neo-orthodox view of Scripture, Scripture *is* God-breathed, it does not *become* so as one reads it.¹³⁰ (3) *All* Scripture is God-breathed. Feinburg carefully points out there is no distinction between Scripture to do with faith and morals, and Scripture which speaks of science and history as some limited inerrantists would

¹²⁸ P.J.Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999) p. 93. Something worthy of note is that the majority of these scholars quote from the RSV in their books assuming that this translation is correct. However see the argument above.

¹²⁹ B.B.Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. S.Craig (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1959) p.133 (emphasis mine).

¹³⁰ Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. G.W.Bromiley [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975]) is particularly associated with the neo-orthodox understanding of Scripture which only sees an *indirect* association between the word of God and the human words of the Bible. However, as has now been seen, such a position is untenable in light of Scripture’s own claims, that the human words of the Bible are *directly* the words of God. For a helpful discussion of the neo-orthodox view, see Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, pp.11-12.

This is not to deny that there is a subjective aspect of the reader being illumined as one reads Scripture, but it is to emphasise that Scripture *is* the word of God even without a reader being there to read it. Again, see Reymond, *Ibid*.

hold¹³¹ – it is *all* God-breathed¹³² (theologians sometimes like to speak of the *plenary* inspiration of Scripture¹³³).

(4) ‘Inspired’ is not the clearest word to use (in fact, it is quite misleading) to describe *Scripture*.

All this leaves us with an end product of Scripture being God-breathed. But still, not much light has been shed on *how* this came about. Many opponents of the received view assume that if the *product* is totally God’s words, then the *process* has to be a form of dictation – sometimes referred to as the mechanical view. Barr accuses ‘fundamentalists’ of extending a prophetic model of revelation (cf. the often cited Jeremiah passages: Jer 1:9; 2:1; 36:1-4, 32) to the whole of Scripture, as the theory of dictation does,¹³⁴ and Barton’s book, *People of the Book* – a phrase from the Qur’an – is titled partly in reference to this, indicating that the ‘fundamentalist’ position of dictation is a lot closer to how the Qur’an came to be revealed than how the Bible was inspired.¹³⁵ However, very few thinkers who hold to the received view have ever

¹³¹ Feinburg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy”, pp.280-281.

¹³² Taking heed of Witherington’s comment below on this point would be helpful for limited inerrantists, as well as for us as we approach the coming chapter on inerrancy followed by two on discrepancies: “I doubt that Paul, Luke, or whoever wrote 2 Timothy was unaware of the problems and interpretive issues involved in various passages of the OT [sic], which makes the claim in 2 Tim 3:16 even more audacious, as if the writer were saying ‘The Bible is the inspired word of God in every passage, despite its warts, wrinkles and problems.’ Surely such a keen and knowledgeable interpreter of the OT as the author of the Pastorals had to struggle with some of its texts.” (B. Witherington, *The Living Word of God* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007] pp.23-24.)

¹³³ Milne helpfully defines: “This adjective [plenary] indicates that the inspiration claimed extends to the *whole* Bible.” (B. Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief*, 2nd edn. [Leicester: IVP, 1998] p.52) Milne then helpfully goes on to clarify, “God has caused *all* Scripture to be written, not only the sections which carry the marks of inspiration most clearly. This is *not* the same as claiming that all parts are equally *significant* in the unfolding of the Bible’s message. A tiny ‘background’ corner in a portrait is less important than the central figure, but it is as surely a product of the artist’s brush and makes its own contribution to the total picture.” (p.6). This idea will be picked up in following chapters.

¹³⁴ Barr devotes a whole chapter to this accusation in *Escaping from Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1984) ch.3.

¹³⁵ J. Barton, *People of the Book: The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1988).

advocated dictation as the means of inspiration.¹³⁶ We turn now to these discussions of the *process*.

Process

Warfield (as with the majority of conservative scholars) wanted to distance himself from the idea that the Bible being God-breathed automatically leads to the process having to be that of dictation.¹³⁷ Rather, he advances a ‘concursive operation’ – by which he means there are both divine and human sides involved in the process of inspiration. The Bible is ultimately authored by God *and* authored by men. He states (in reference to a psalm, or a New Testament letter for example) “...no human activity – not even the control of the will is superseded, but the Holy Spirit works *in, with and through* them all in such a manner as to communicate to the product qualities distinctly superhuman.”¹³⁸ For Warfield, the divine miracle of the inspiration process means that ultimately God lies behind every word that was written, but not at the expense of full human authorship, and the full human authorship does not in any way diminish divine authorship. With this in mind, (to an extent) Warfield drew a parallel between the dual authorship of Scripture (being fully divine and fully human) and the dual nature of Christ, but was wary of pressing the analogy too far because “[1] There is no hypostatic union between the divine and the human in Scripture; we cannot parallel the ‘inscripturation’ of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son of God...[2] ...they [the union of divine and human factors in the one] unite to

¹³⁶ Warfield does mention a few such from the 17th century such as Heidegger, Hooker and White (B.B.Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Meeter [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1973] p.543.) but there are none from the last fifty years.

¹³⁷ Despite so many refutations of this idea, the accusation that evangelicals’ (or as he calls them ‘fundamentalists’) view of inspiration having to be a mechanical dictation process was still being circulated by Barr in the late eighties.

¹³⁸ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol.2, pp.545-6 (emphasis mine).

constitute a divine-human person, in the other they co-operate to perform a divine-human work.”¹³⁹

Many have objected to Warfield on the grounds that the human authors were subject to conditioning factors which would have affected the way they wrote in terms of their background, education and experiences. This is a variation on the accommodation theory often attributed to Jesus’ words.¹⁴⁰ The argument was around at the time of Warfield in the form

As light that passes through the coloured glass of a cathedral window is light from heaven, but it is stained by the tints of the glass through which it passes, so any word of God which passed through the mind and soul of a man must come out discoloured by the personality through which it is given, and just to that degree ceases to be the pure Word of God.¹⁴¹

Warfield’s response is that ‘concursive operation’ was effective not just at the time of inscripturation, but covers the preparation of both the material and the writer. God “prepared a Paul to write [his letters], and the Paul he brought to the task was a Paul

¹³⁹ B.B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority* (1979) p.162.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Accommodation’ is a slippery word – it is used correctly to speak of God ‘accommodating’ himself to speak to men by speaking in language they can understand. However, it is sometimes pressed further than this, the suggestion being that God accommodated himself espousing the common errors of knowledge of those people to communicate better. Such an understanding of ‘accommodation’ lies behind both Enns’ view of inspiration in *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) (see for example p.109), and also behind Sparks’ view in *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008]. Sparks, for example, comments that accommodation is “God’s adoption in inscripturation of the human audience’s finite and fallen perspective...[thinking of it as such] can help us provide better answers for many of the problems we face in the sacred text” (p. 258). But Lewis’ distinction below gives a better rendering, “The unlimited Son enjoying all the benefits of the Father’s immediate presence chose to leave those privileges behind and to limit the use of his powers while existing as a human being. Though limited, he was without sin. Similarly, the Bible is limited, though without error. Large as it is, it does not contain all of God’s infinite knowledge. Partial knowledge is, nevertheless, still knowledge.” And again in reference to Jesus, “Jesus did not *accommodate* himself to the errors of his day, though he *adapted* Himself to the level of His hearers. The prophets adapted the teaching of their message to the people of their times but did not teach the errors of pagan religions surrounding them in the process. Adaption? Yes. Error? No.” (G.R. Lewis, “The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture” in *Inerrancy*, pp.252-3 [emphasis mine].)

¹⁴¹ Cited in Lewis, “The Human Authorship”, p.250.

who spontaneously would write just such letters.”¹⁴² It is worth quoting his response to the stained glass analogy in full.

But what if this personality has itself been formed by God into precisely the personality it is, for the express purpose of communicating to the word given through it just the colouring which it gives it? What if the colours of the stained glass window have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them? What if the word of God that comes to his people is framed by God into the word of God it is, precisely by means of the qualities of the men formed by him for the purpose, through which it is given? When we think of God the Lord giving by his Spirit a body of authoritative Scriptures to his people, we must remember that he is the God of providence and of grace as well as of revelation and inspiration, and that he holds all the lines of preparation as fully under his direction as he does the specific operation which we call technically, in the narrow sense, by the name of ‘inspiration.’¹⁴³

Warfield is arguing by this, that at the time of actual inspiration proper – inscripturation, there was the exact David, John, Paul – human author - ready to write God’s words. His understanding is supported by a couple of hints in Scripture. Firstly, God’s calling of Jeremiah (Jer 1:5), “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” And also Gal 1:15-16: “But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles...” It is also helpful at this point to bring in the other clue Scripture gives us to its ‘inspiration,’ 2 Pt 1:21. Peter, speaking of the prophecies of Scripture¹⁴⁴ says that they never had their origin in the will of man¹⁴⁵, but (ἀλλὰ) men (the prophets)

¹⁴² Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, (1948) p.155.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.155-6.

¹⁴⁴ We are making the assumption again that although Peter’s reference is immediately to do with Old Testament, Peter would have been happy to include New Testament writings in his identification of Scripture (cf. 2 Pt 3:16).

¹⁴⁵ The reference to *origin* is the ultimate origin and authorship of Scripture. It therefore does not contradict what Warfield says.

spoke¹⁴⁶ from God, and *they were carried along by the Holy Spirit* (ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι). We saw hints as to this in chapter 2 where we noted that it was common in Jesus' and the apostles' language to hear them say something like 'David himself speaking by the Holy Spirit declared...'. The important word in 2 Pt 1:21 is φερόμενοι ("carried along"). This word appears in Acts 27:15 in the form ἐφερόμεθα in the context "The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were *driven along* (ἐφερόμεθα)." So the human authors wrote the words they wanted to, but God carried along the whole process in such a way as to bring those human authors to write his very words. Warfield refers to the whole process of inspiration as God's *superintendence*.

Opponents of the orthodox view often object to the combination of both God *and* the human authors writing concursively as being impossible - which is often where the idea of dictation or, for that matter, accommodation comes in. Either God is the author *or* humans are the authors. However, this exposes sliding worldviews and wrong pre-suppositions, having slipped from Christian theism, which the Bible propagates, through deism and even to naturalism that is out of line with Scripture.

Packer in 1958 identified the problem as

...a false doctrine of God, here particularly of his providence. For it assumes that God and man stand in such a relationship to each other that they cannot both be free agents in the same action. If man acts freely (i.e. voluntarily and spontaneously), God does not, and vice versa. The two freedoms are mutually exclusive. But the affinities of this idea are with Deism, not Christian Theism.¹⁴⁷

It should be admitted that the view of providence upon which Warfield's view of inspiration rests, is the Reformed Calvinist view which would have been so deeply

¹⁴⁶ This includes writing – see verse 20.

¹⁴⁷ J.I.Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Leicester: IVF, 1958) p.81.

held by Warfield (though there is still room for someone of an Arminian persuasion to accept it); but it appears herein lies the problem for most scholars. *Because of* (often unexamined¹⁴⁸) alternative worldviews (ones which let go of the tension the Bible holds between God's sovereignty and human responsibility), a great many cannot come to terms with the fact that God can be sovereign, yet, humans responsible at the same time, hence not being able to accept Warfield's concursive view.¹⁴⁹ However, Warfield's theistic Calvinist worldview is one that is totally in line with the worldview the Bible propagates, so his concursive operation is a valid proposal.

But, returning to the issue of the process, even learning of the providential lead up to 'inspiration proper' (inscripturation), Warfield seems to imply that this 'inspiration proper' itself is another (and final) stage in the process. So once more, how the writers were inspired¹⁵⁰ has to be asked – what made them put pen to paper to bring about the God-breathed Scripture? This is where Warfield cannot go much further:

How it was given through them is left meanwhile, if not without suggestion yet without specific explanation. We seem safe only in inferring this much: that the gift of Scripture through its human authors took place by a process much more intimate than can be expressed by the term 'dictation', and that it took place in a process in which the control of the Holy Spirit was too complete and pervasive to permit the human qualities of the secondary authors in any way to condition the purity of the product as the word of God.¹⁵¹

Some of the hints he refers to are: the visions, dreams, the word of the Lord some of the prophets saw (e.g. Ezek 10:1, Amos 1:1), hearing the voice of the Lord in his

¹⁴⁸ See Craig's critique of theologians who do not analyse their own philosophical worldview before bringing it to the theological academy in his article *Advice to Christian Apologists*, Available: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5341> (Accessed 30th April 2009).

¹⁴⁹ Kevin Vanhoozer has recently written a fascinating article on God's mighty speech-acts being a pathway into Holy Scripture. The article analyses the underlying (most often, unrealised) pre-suppositions of many scholars who do not hold to the received view and shows that for many of them, what underlies their work on 'inspiration' is more like a process theology doctrine of God rather than a Biblical doctrine of God. (K.Vanhoozer, "God's mighty speech-acts" in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, P.E.Satterthwaite and D.F.Wright [eds.] [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002] pp.143-181.)

¹⁵⁰ Note: It is correct to here speak of inspired (no need for inverted commas) as is a reference to the writers not to the writings.

¹⁵¹ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority* (1959) pp.152-3.

temple (Is 6:8), the studying and commenting on the writings of the other prophets (Jer 31:3-6). Further, John 14:26 indicates that Jesus' disciples who observed his life and heard his teaching would be reminded of those things at the times that they needed to by the Holy Spirit, Luke's research inspired him to write (Lk 1:1-4), Paul used his own personal judgment (1 Cor 7:25), as well as dictation (Rev 2-3) etc. yet in many cases Scripture does not indicate the process. Jensen writes:

'Inspiration' is the appropriate category as long as the work of the Spirit is involved...The different personalities, historical situations, linguistic skills and styles of the authors are plain to anyone who investigates the matter. The Lord's hand is not shortened that he cannot use these and many other ways of communicating what he wishes to reveal. His providential ordering of events even includes his ordering of the words of individuals who were entirely unconscious of the experience of inspiration as they uttered or wrote their words. Caiaphas, for example, was completely unaware of speaking at the Lord's command; for him the ordinary processes of reason dictated what he was going to say. So he unwittingly spoke the word of God: 'He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one' (Jn 11:51-52).¹⁵²

So although hints are present, we have to be content to leave a lot of the inspiration of the writers as mystery.

Summary of Warfield's position

Thus to summarise Warfield's doctrine of 'inspiration', it consists of a process and a product. The product is God-breathed Scripture, the process was superintended. If we want to break down the process yet further, we can say God's providence formed all the characteristics, gifts, etc. of the human author up to and during the moment of inspiration proper resulting in the writers writing the exact words God intended to be written.

¹⁵² Jensen, *Revelation of God*, p.157.

This is not to say that Warfield always demonstrated the divine-human balance in his writings. He is often accused of over-emphasising the divine aspect of Scripture at the expense of the human, describing Scripture as being divine content with only style and personality added to the writings by the human authors. It is likely that Warfield swings more towards the ‘docetic’ tendency because of the time he was writing in with his opponents leaning more to the ‘arianist’ tendency. This is still happening today; conservative scholars (e.g. Wayne Grudem) it appears, constantly feel the need to defend the divine side of Scripture but in so doing inadvertently follow Warfield’s ‘docetic inclination’.¹⁵³ It is also clear that Warfield had a rationalistic streak. His formal basis for Scripture is not its own ‘inspiration’. Rather, Warfield thinks that the Scriptures “we first prove authentic, historically reliable, generally trustworthy, before we prove them inspired.”¹⁵⁴ And again, the ‘inspired’ Scripture is not for him the formal basis of truth:

Inspiration, in its more exact sense, cannot come into the discussion until theism, the reality of revelation, the authenticity and historical credibility of the Scriptures, the divine origin and character of the religion which they present, and the general trustworthiness of their presentation of it, have already been established.¹⁵⁵

Begbie’s conclusion is in some sense apt:

His rationalism has the effect of eclipsing the Spirit to *Christ* who

¹⁵³ For a good article which redresses this unevenness see G.R.Lewis, “The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture” in *Inerrancy*, ch. 8. See also Enns who argues that scholars who lean towards this Scriptural docetism must redress the balance and recognise “the human marks of the Bible” which are “everywhere, thoroughly integrated into the nature of Scripture itself” (*Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005] p.18 [emphasis his]). In building upon Warfield’s comparison of the incarnation of Christ with the ‘inspiration’ of Scripture, Enns affirms: “That the Bible, at every turn, shows how ‘connected’ it is to its own world, is a necessary consequence of God incarnating himself. . . . It is essential to the very nature of revelation that the Bible is not unique to its environment. The human dimension of Scripture is essential to its being Scripture” (p.20, emphasis his). Enns’ work could potentially be a helpful corrective, however in his view that God ‘accommodated’ (see footnote 140) himself in the writing, he swings *too* far towards the humanity of Scriptures. And though he speaks much of an incarnational model, in his book, very little is said about Christ’s divinity, so the arianist emphasis of Scripture (that Warfield was trying to refute) ends up being a more accurate description of Enns’ work than the incarnational balance he seeks to advance.

¹⁵⁴ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, (1948) p.210.

¹⁵⁵ Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. 2, p.632.

lays a claim on us as *whole persons* – mind, spirit and body. Warfield did believe in the Christ-centred ministry of the Spirit yet when speaking of biblical inspiration this curiously slips into the background.¹⁵⁶

But fortunately, this rationalism and tendency to inadvertently emphasise the divine side of inspiration did not affect the balance of his overall thesis on inspiration outlined above.

Alternative understandings of ‘inspiration’

A lot of space has been taken looking at Warfield’s work. This is proportionate to the amount he has written and the influence his writings have had, but consideration must now be given briefly to how the more recent definitions of Scripture fare in light of Warfield’s work. Already, attention has been drawn to the less rigorous exegesis of 2 Tim 3:16 proposed by Barr and Abraham (as well as Trembath and Achtemeier); and starting with a less than adequate understanding of this key verse may suggest their understandings of ‘inspiration’ might not be as strong either, but certain aspects of their work help us in the drawing of conclusions on ‘inspiration’.

Barr’s view of ‘inspiration’ is strongly influenced by his neo-liberal pre-suppositions and his view of revelation. In direct contrast to the verbal ‘inspiration’ of Warfield, he states, “We do not have any idea of ways in which God might straightforwardly communicate articulate thoughts or sentences to men; it just doesn’t happen.”¹⁵⁷ So Scripture cannot be said to be the direct word of God, from God to man. Rather, he sees Scripture as being an account from *man* to man, a human record authored (solely [without any dual authorship from God]) by the believing

¹⁵⁶ J.Begbie, ‘Who is this God? – Biblical Inspiration Revisited’ *Tyndale Bulletin*, 43.2 (1992) 265 (emphasis his).

¹⁵⁷ Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World*, p.17.

community, attempting to understand and transmit their religious tradition.¹⁵⁸ The relation of *God* to inspiration within this is quite vague, he describes it “in some sense” as God being “in contact with his people in ancient times” and “present in their formation of their tradition.”¹⁵⁹ This means that Barr leaves room for two implications: (a) that there is no reason why religious tradition about God can not be found outside of the Bible as well as within, and (b) there is no reason why inspiration should not continue in some sense today in the same sense that it originally happened. Identifying the first implication, Barr does attribute a special status to the Bible because (and in response to one of Ward’s critiques that Barr has difficulty in explaining the closure of the canon¹⁶⁰) when the canon was formed / decided upon, it was given special status again by the believing community,¹⁶¹ meaning that it is “the classic model for understanding God.”¹⁶² This leaves the second implication which Barr is perfectly happy with too (as said above):

Today I think we believe, or have to believe, that God’s communication with the men of the biblical period was not on any different terms from the mode of his communication with people today.¹⁶³

Such a view is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly Barr demonstrates what has already been said above, that his theology is affected by his unexamined worldview and doctrine of God, rendering him unable him to believe in a speaking God, a God who directly reveals himself to his people. Such philosophical pre-

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.120.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.17-18.

¹⁶⁰ T.Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, biblical texts and the sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p.271-2.

¹⁶¹ Barr, *Bible in the Modern World*, pp.117-118. Although Barr is a liberal Protestant theologian, such a position clearly has affinities with the Roman Catholic view of the formation of the canon, the Church stamping it and conferring authority to it.

¹⁶² Ibid., pp.117-118.

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp.17-18. (In light of fn 94) Barr would therefore be an advocate of a *non-identity* thesis. Again, as will be seen, such a view is untenable in light of Scripture’s claims. So, the obvious conclusion (that should already have emerged) is that the word of God is directly associated with the human words of the Bible – the *direct identity* thesis (sometimes referred to as the ‘orthodox’ view or ‘the Scripture Principle’).

suppositions have led him astray in his theology. Also, his view of ‘inspiration’ is very much out of line with Scripture’s own testimony (chapter 2), the view of all the Bible writers is that what they were writing was the direct word of God. Although Barr anticipates such a critique, he does not counter at all convincingly to it, his only response being that there is a difference between “the surface account furnished by the Bible and *our* understanding of what was happening.”¹⁶⁴ Far too many verses have been shown in chapter 2 to speak of the divine origin of Scripture for this to be a valid answer. Thirdly, in locating ‘inspiration’ as an event in the believing community rather than in the Scripture from God, Barr inadvertently leaves no objective standard against which to measure the experiences of the community – the experiences they would claim to be the presence of God. On this view, we have lost an absolute criterion of truth leaving the door open for any religious community to say that they had had an experience of God to justify their actions, e.g. The Heaven’s gate cult. So Barr’s view of inspiration is found wanting in contrast to Warfield’s.

Abraham’s and Trembath’s (who is influenced by Abraham’s) perspective is stronger and somewhat more orthodox than Barr’s, in many ways following the Scripture Principle in its thinking. Yet, both still makes a similar error to Barr in that ‘inspiration’ is located within *people* rather than in Scripture. In this instance, through faulty exegesis of 2 Tim 3:16, Abraham comes to the conclusion that ‘inspiration’ is something that happened to the *human authors* as they wrote Scripture. He argues that God inspired the human authors through his revelatory and saving acts as well as by his personal dealings with individuals, the result being they wrote the Scripture we have now.¹⁶⁵ Trembath concurs arguing that biblical inspiration refers:

to the enhancement of one’s understanding of God brought about

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.122.

¹⁶⁵ Abraham, *Divine Inspiration*, p.67.

instrumentally through the Bible, rather than to the mysterious and non-repeatable process by which ‘God got written what He wanted’ in the Bible.¹⁶⁶

Such a view is not as error-stricken as Barr’s, but underlines yet further how important careful exegesis of 2 Tim 3:16 is. In this case the word θεὸπνευστος has been left unexamined, and rather than being understood in its technical sense to refer to God-breathed Scripture, Abraham and Trembath have understood it to mean “inspiration” and have read the 21st century English understanding of the word back into 2 Tim 3:16. Both would do well to remember Carson’s comment

θεὸπνευστος is explicitly tied by the pastoral letters to the text of Scripture, to the γραφή not to the process.¹⁶⁷

Again, locating ‘inspiration’ as an event that happens in *people* also means that Abraham and Trembath fall under Ward’s critique (without reply this time) - they too have difficulty in explaining the closure of the canon. Although Abraham and Trembath would definitely want to say that the canon is now closed (through recognition of the authority the Bible has as opposed to authority conferred on it like Barr), their definitions (given at the start of this chapter), unfortunately leave open the possibility of on-going ‘inspiration’ happening today in the religious community. Lewis, almost anticipating some of these later inadequate definitions, leaves us with a helpful caution:

All believers are indwelt, taught, and filled with the Spirit; *only* the writers of Scripture are said to have been inspired by the Spirit. The writers had the ministries of the Spirit common to all the people of God, but in addition they had the special supervision of the Spirit as prophetic and apostolic spokesmen in their work of composing and writing books of the Bible. The unique authority enjoyed by the prophets and the apostles among their peers was not common to all the people who experienced justification by faith. Our doctrine of inspiration should reflect something of that unique delegated, veracious, and special inspired authority.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Trembath, *Evangelical Theories*, p.103.

¹⁶⁷ D.A.Carson, ‘Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review’, *TJ* 27.1 (2006) 12.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what we have done in this chapter is used Warfield's outline to look at what Scripture says about its own 'inspiration' and have come to conclude with him, that it speaks of itself as a God-breathed product with a superintended process leading to that final product. It has been identified that most scholars who disagree with Warfield's thesis do so (1) because of their lack of critical engagement with Scripture's own teaching on its 'inspiration' (particularly 2 Tim 3:16) (2) because their worldviews are not that which the Bible propagates – Christian theism, and (3) because when referring to 'inspiration' they are thinking of it too much with the connotations the word inspiration has in the modern English language, as opposed to using the word in the theological technical sense. (1) and (2) are errors that can only be identified to be rectified, however, with point (3), it has probably been noticed by the constant use of putting the word 'inspiration' in inverted commas, that this author thinks that it is an inappropriate word to use to speak of both product and process because it *is* misleading. The reasons being that when referring to Scripture - the product, it is from a wrong translation - from the Latin Vulgate - that we use the word 'inspired'. Secondly, in our modern English, to speak of the word inspired brings up connotations very similar to Abraham of a teacher doing certain things to inspire a *pupil's own product*. The work done on 2 Tim 3:16 shows that this is not what Scripture is – it is *God's* product. To speak of the process and the *writer* being *inspired* is correct, but the product, the *Scripture*, is *God-breathed*. Warfield and many others have grouped the two under the one category of 'inspiration', and this word now has a long history of being the umbrella word for both product and process.

¹⁶⁸ Lewis, "Human Authorship", p.256. (emphasis mine).

However, seeing the mistakes made particularly recently by this word fallacy, one cannot help but think that it is misleading and contend that it would be better not to group the two under the one word, but rather to either remain with ‘God-breathed’ or adopt McGowan’s change in terminology, suggesting that we should speak of ‘the Divine *Spiration* of Scripture’,¹⁶⁹ and maybe keep (if possible) *inspiration* to be used only in reference to the human writers. This has an impact on statements of faith. The majority of statements have a clause something like, “*The Bible, as originally given, is the inspired and infallible Word of God...etc.*” Though in this case, the word infallible is a fairly helpful corrector, using the word inspired in the clause is surely a result of the longstanding mistakes written about above. Would it not be more biblical and eliminate more misunderstanding if the word ‘inspired’ was switched with ‘God-breathed’ or ‘Spirated’? So with point (3), in our writing, it would be better to use two words, ‘God-breathed’ / ‘Spirated’ (in reference to Scripture) and ‘inspired’ (in reference to writers) rather than just the one – ‘inspiration’ - to clarify and hopefully avoid confusion in the future.

¹⁶⁹ The title of A.T.B.McGowan’s recent book, (Leicester: Apollos, 2007).

Part 3

Deduction and Second-phase Induction

Chapter 4: The Meaning of Inerrancy

Part 2 has investigated Scripture using the first stage of the retroductive methodology - an inductive approach, which has shown that Scripture claims to be of divine origin and authorship, and that it is God-breathed – it is the very word of God.¹⁷⁰ Having made these points, it would then appear that, as we begin part 3, it would not be a very far step to deduce the conclusion that the Bible is inerrant – God always speaks the truth, the Bible is his word, therefore, the Bible is true. Indeed, Warfield sometimes used the words, ‘inspired’ and inerrant synonymously in his writing, implying that the Bible could not be ‘inspired’ if it was not inerrant and vice versa. However, simple as this may at first seem (despite the findings of the previous two chapters generally being accepted), as said in the introduction, the doctrine of inerrancy has been the centre of contentious debate, and has - in some cases - unfortunately led to the polarising of Evangelicals into different camps over the issue. This alone warns us from jumping too quickly to a conclusion.

A lot of the problem in the debate has been due to misunderstanding of the word ‘inerrancy’ and what people mean when they use it. Though the Chicago Statement of Inerrancy (1978)¹⁷¹ has been of much help in this regard, the everyday Christian as well as a number of scholars today, are still not entirely sure what it means to speak of the Bible as inerrant. So this and the following chapter will focus on the heart of what the dissertation seeks to investigate: what the doctrine of inerrancy is and what it means.

In this part of the thesis, two phases of the retroductive method will be combined - deduction, followed by the second phase of induction - to help us arrive at a solid

¹⁷⁰ D.Carson reminds us (as we saw in chapter 2) “The biblical writers use ‘God’s word’ and ‘God’s words’ inter-changably (e.g. Ex 4:12; Num 22:38; Deut 18:18-20; Jer 14:14; 23:16-40; 29:31-32; Ezek 2:7; 13:1-19 passim) (‘Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review’ *TJ* 27:1 [2006] 8.)

¹⁷¹ The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy can be found at www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html (Accessed 3rd March 2009)

definition of inerrancy. In the first half of this particular chapter, the legitimacy of making some kind of deduction that the Bible is inerrant will be shown - demonstrating its link with the character of God, and so fairly roughly defining what is meant by inerrancy. Then in the second half, by returning and initiating the second stage of induction, this will help alter our definition, making it more nuanced because it has been revised in the light of more inductive work; work done on the phenomena of Scripture. This definition will then be refined yet further in the coming chapters, which will look at further phenomena that could potentially falsify or adjust the definition of inerrancy we are seeking to establish.

Deduction and Rough definition

Essentially, when using the word ‘inerrancy’, we are speaking of *truthfulness* or *trustworthiness*.¹⁷² Whenever anyone is asking whether the Bible is ‘inerrant’, they are fundamentally asking whether or not the Bible is true and whether we can trust what it says.

The Scriptural warrant for the doctrine of inerrancy comes (as was outlined above) from the fact that all of the Bible is God’s words, and Scripture speaks of God as being one who is always truthful and can never lie (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Tit 1:2; Heb 6:18 [also see Rom 3:4]). Therefore, as one’s words are an extension of oneself, God’s *words* are also true. In fact, Scripture goes further than that, it affirms that God is *truth* (Jn 14:6) and therefore his word is truth too (Ps 119 especially v.160; Prov

¹⁷² These two are very closely linked. Packer identifies that “truth in the Bible is a quality of persons primarily, and of propositions only secondarily: it means stability, reliability, firmness, trustworthiness, the quality of a person who is entirely self-consistent, realistic and undeceived.” (J.I.Packer, *Knowing God* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973] p.124).

30:6; Isa 45:19; Jn 17:17) – meaning that Scripture is an epistemic standard of truth by which anything else (that claims to be true) must be measured.¹⁷³

Looking at it from a slightly different angle, in the latter parts of the New Testament – particularly in the pastoral letters - the phrase “this is a trustworthy saying” occurs frequently (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Tit 3:8), apparently in reference to some earlier pieces of creeds / tradition that the apostles may have handed to the churches. However, because all of Scripture is given by a truthful God who is faithful to his word, then when referring to *any* proposition in the Bible, the words “This is a trustworthy saying” would be an accurate description. Helm asserts “A trustworthy God who desired to be trusted would surely not leave an untrustworthy account of himself.”¹⁷⁴ And again Watson states “A trustworthy God and a trustworthy Bible: the emphasis falls now on one and now on the other for these are two sides of the same coin.”¹⁷⁵ This again brings to mind the interconnectedness of doctrine, in that a person’s views about Scripture – God’s word, will be very closely linked with what they think about God himself. God is trustworthy, true, eternal, holy, powerful, authoritative (more could be added to the list)¹⁷⁶, therefore, so is his word because God’s word is an extension of himself.¹⁷⁷ Packer’s summary is helpful for the topic of inerrancy:

What Scripture says is to be received as the infallible Word of the

¹⁷³ It may be objected that such a deduction is too simplistic, however, such a deduction is made by the apostle Paul himself in Titus 1:2. Arguing that faith and knowledge rest on a promise of God, Paul argues that because God does not lie, his promise is to be trusted as being true.

¹⁷⁴ P.Helm, “The Perfect Trustworthiness of God” in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, P.Helm and C.Trueman (eds.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) p.240.

¹⁷⁵ F.Watson, “An Evangelical Response” in Helm and Trueman (eds.), *The Trustworthiness of God*, p.286.

¹⁷⁶ Many of God’s attributes of himself could also be used to describe Scripture, however, there are obviously limits – we could not for example speak of God’s word as omnipresent.

¹⁷⁷ Returning to the idea of response to what God says in Scripture, Helm notes, “There is also an important element of reflexivity to trustworthiness; that is, trustworthiness has to do with a relation between what the one who is trustworthy has said or done and some other individual, some other person to whom what is said or done was initially addressed. So, trustworthiness involves an initial action, and then a further act or action that is the act or action of being faithful or trustful to what one has said or done.” Helm, “The Perfect Trustworthiness”, p.240.

infallible God, and to assert biblical inerrancy and infallibility is just to confess faith in (i) the divine origin of the Bible and (ii) the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God. The value of these terms is that they conserve the principle of biblical authority; for statements that are not absolutely true and reliable could not be absolutely authoritative.¹⁷⁸

As further discussion will disclose, defining inerrancy along the lines of truth and trustworthiness automatically makes many of the objections to the doctrine mute.

However, having loosely defined inerrancy in this way, a couple of clarifications need to be highlighted to elucidate what *exactly* it is that is being spoken of when speaking of an inerrant Bible, and how that is to be interpreted.

Clarifications of Inerrancy

1. (Total) Inerrancy refers *only to the autographs of Scripture*. (Not to copies used in church history, or to the copies we have now.) This clarification needs to be established because - as any study of textual criticism will show – the Scripture as we have it now is not identical to the original manuscripts; small errors of copying have crept in, corrupting slightly what was originally penned in the inerrant autographs of Scripture. Calvin showed concern about textual corruption demonstrated by his commentaries on Hebrews 9:1 and James 4:7,¹⁷⁹ and, as early as the Fathers, Augustine – in his letter to Jerome (letter 82) - said that anything he found contrary to truth in Scripture, “I decided that either the text is corrupt, or the translator did not follow what was really said, or that I have failed to understand it.”

There have been two objections to this clarification. The first is that to confine inerrancy only to the originals is dishonest. Opponents of inerrancy see this simply as

¹⁷⁸ Packer, *Fundamentalism*, pp 95-96. Packer uses the word ‘infallible’ in the traditional sense of the word which is not very different from the meaning of inerrancy. However, since his book, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, infallible has been attributed a meaning somewhat different – a fuller discussion will follow in later chapters.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960) pp.27-28.

an apologetic move used to prevent any supposed error discovered from actually being proved an error – the inerrantists could always reply “it was not in the original.” But, as the following quote from Warfield highlights, the autographs clarification was never intended as such an apologetic, rather, it is necessary simply because of the reason given above. If discrepancies were found that were obviously also in the originals, one could not hide behind this clarification of inerrancy:

That some of the difficulties and apparent discrepancies in current texts disappear on the restoration of the true text of Scripture is undoubtedly true. That *all* the difficulties and apparent discrepancies in current texts of Scripture are matters of textual corruption, and not, rather, often of historical or other ignorance on our part, *no sane man ever asserted*.¹⁸⁰

The other objection to the original manuscript clarification is over the implications such a clarification has for the Bibles we possess today. The most outspoken scholar on this is Pinnock. Actually arguing against some of his earlier work¹⁸¹, Pinnock (with the arguably admirable motive of focussing Christians on the Bibles we actually have in our possession rather than on ones we do not [the autographs]) is concerned that:

(a) if only a flawless Bible is trustworthy;

(b) we have no flawless Bible since we have no autograph;

then

(c) the conclusion must be that we cease to trust the Bible we have.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ B.B. Warfield, “Inerrancy of Original Autographs” reprinted in *Selected Shorted Writings of B.B. Warfield*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973) pp.581-82 (emphasis mine). See further my following chapters for examples of this.

¹⁸¹ Pinnock is well known for having been an avid defender of inerrancy (C.Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* [Chicago: Moody, 1971], C.Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy” in *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the trustworthiness of Scripture*, J.W. Montgomery, [ed.] [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974]) but then softening his position later in his career (cf. *The Scripture Principle* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985]).

¹⁸² C.Pinnock “Three View of the Bible” in *Biblical Authority*, J.Rogers (ed.) (Waco: Word Books, 1977) p.65. A variation on the argument put more simply comes from Olson, “Think about this: If the Bible’s authority depends on its inerrancy but only the original manuscripts were inerrant, then only the original manuscripts were authoritative” (“Why Inerrancy Doesn’t Matter,” *The Baptist Standard*,

Pinnock then argues that “Surely a God who can inspire error-free composition could also inspire error-free copying.”¹⁸³ Achtemeier builds on Pinnock’s work arguing, “If having the exact inerrant copies is not important for *us*, why was it important originally?”¹⁸⁴ “Since he [God] did not [exactly preserve Scripture for us], it would appear he did not think our possession of error-free Scripture very important.”¹⁸⁵ In response to these assertions, it is helpful to take Greg Bahnsen’s distinction between the autographic *codex* (the actual physical document) - which we do not have, and the autographic *text* (the words which were written on that document) - which on the whole we do.¹⁸⁶ Throughout the Bible, there is very little mention of actual autographic codices – presumably because eventually they perished and were not possessed for any significant amount of time - but there *are* a number of references to the confidence people had in their *copies* of those autographical codices they possessed, because they accurately reflected the autographic *text* that was written on those codices. For example, the very first set of the ten commandments were broken in half by Moses in his distress at the Israelites’ idolatry (Ex 32:19), but the second set God gave him were an exact copy of the originals (Ex 34:1-4). Another example would be the codex of Jeremiah’s scroll which was burned, but the autographic text lived on in the exact copy he re-wrote (Jer 36). Confidence in the transmission of the autographic text is also highlighted when God states that every king of Israel should each write out a copy of the law to have as their own possession (Dt 17:18). Solomon must have possessed or had access to one, demonstrated by David’s charge to him to

February 3, 2006, Available: http://www.baptiststandard.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4670&Itemid=134 [accessed 7th May 2009]).

¹⁸³ Pinnock, “Three Views”, p.66.

¹⁸⁴ P.J.Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) p.60 (emphasis mine).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.59.

¹⁸⁶ G.Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa” in *Inerrancy*, N.Geisler (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) pp.150-193. As will be seen below, through the careful work of textual criticism, a very good prototype of the original manuscripts can be pieced together from the earliest manuscripts we have in our possession.

keep the requirements of the law as written in the law of Moses (1 Kgs 2:3), and by living according to that, Solomon pleased God because he lived by his word (albeit for some of his reign [1 Kgs 2-10]). Josiah was another, who, when he found a copy of the law, was distressed as he realised Judah had not been following God's law – the copy so reflected the original law of Moses that these kings could live by it and know God's word for their reigns.

Examples in the New Testament of the reliability of copies and preservation of the autographic text are (as we have already seen in chapter 2) Jesus' assumption that they, the Bibles in his time, were reliable. His arguments with the Pharisees were based on the fact that they should have known better what God says from their copies of the Old Testament. Moreover, the teaching and quoting that Jesus and the apostles did of the Old Testament would have come from copies – often from the Septuagint, a translation from the original Hebrew – which, in the passages they cite, they appear content with that what the Septuagint conveyed was a correct rendering of the original Hebrew text.¹⁸⁷

Scripture itself promises that God's word will abide forever (Isa 40:8; Mt 5:18, 24:35; Lk 16:17; 1 Pt 1:24-25), so the importance of preserving God's words is emphasised throughout Scripture with severe warnings for anyone who added to or took away from what God originally said (Dt 4:2; 12:32; Prov 20:6; Isa 8:20; Rev 22:18-19).¹⁸⁸ And we know from history how meticulous later copyists of the Bible

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p.170. It is to be remembered that every Jewish boy, by the time he was twelve in first century Jewish society, would have been thoroughly educated in the Old Testament Torah (in Hebrew) (H.Maccoby, *Judaism in the First Century* [London: Sheldon Press, 1989] pp.71-72), many being able to cite it all from memory, some being able to recite further the prophets and writings. This level of familiarity with the Old Testament, in addition to Jesus' promising that his Spirit of truth (Jn 16:13) would come on the disciples guiding them *into* all truth, indicates that all of them were a firm authority who knew what was a correct rendering of the original text, and what was a dubious paraphrase from the Septuagint to be ignored in their citation of it.

¹⁸⁸ Scholars have hypothesised over the "scrolls and parchments" Paul asks Timothy to bring him in 2 Tim 4:13. Bahnsen speculates as to whether they are copies of his letters to other churches, Paul

were (presumably partly because of the warnings and recognition of the abiding nature of God's word) to preserve the autographic text from the autographic codices.¹⁸⁹

So in response to Pinnock and Achtemeier, it should be said that yes, it was of vital importance that the autographs were inerrant because it is God who ultimately authored them and God does not lie, but so also is it of vital importance that the Bibles we have today are – as much as is possible – in such a condition too. That is why so much time and effort is put into the discipline of textual criticism. Although there are minor problems / errors of copying over the two millennia since the completion of the canon, these are only trivial, and most translations today footnote where these difficulties are – none of them touch on any point of major doctrine.¹⁹⁰

Harris notes:

To all intents and purposes we have the autographs and thus when we say we believe in verbal inspiration of the autographs, we are not talking of something imaginary and far off but of the texts written by those inspired men and preserved for us so carefully by faithful believers of a long past age.¹⁹¹

This is also supported by Geisler and Nix's conclusion that through the careful work of textual criticism, 99.5% of the original manuscripts have been preserved for us in

wanting to check that they had been copied faithfully – though it is just a suggestion. (Bahnsen, "The Autographa", p.160).

¹⁸⁹ Obviously (even with such meticulousness), a few minor mistakes would have crept in at this stage, as was the case (particularly with the New Testament copying) in the very early years of the Church, when all the writings of the apostles were copied fervently to circulate to Christians across the known world.

¹⁹⁰ For an excellent survey of the transmission process of the New Testament see B.Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* (New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 [reprint]), or F.F.Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they reliable?* (Leicester, IVP, 1981 [reprint]). For the Old Testament, see W.C.Kaiser, *The Old Testament Documents: Are they Reliable and Relevant?* (Illinois: IVP, 2001)

¹⁹¹ R.L.Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1971) p.94.

copies, and that where there is any ‘serious’ alternative, it is always footnoted to make us aware of the variant.¹⁹²

It should also be clarified that although ‘*inspiration*’ was a *miracle* which guarded against error, “Its [the Bible’s] *transmission* is guarded by his *providential* but not his miraculous care.”¹⁹³ God *could* have inspired the transmission of the Scriptures so they were exactly what were written on the codices but from the textual evidence, we see he chose not to.¹⁹⁴ Why he did not preserve the exact originals we can only conjecture – Geisler and Nix suggesting, to stop people idolising the books themselves¹⁹⁵ (cf. how Hezekiah is not reprimanded for burning the bronze snake because people were worshipping it – 2 Kgs 18:3-4), Wenham arguing that it keeps our eyes on the bigger picture of Scripture rather than the smaller details,¹⁹⁶ but these are merely speculation, so most inerrantists are content to leave it as an unrevealed mystery. But to summarise, we can leave this section on the autographs agreeing with Bahnsen that the Bibles we have today are “[inerrant and] adequate for bringing people to a knowledge of saving truth and for directing their lives...to the extent that, they reproduce the original, autographic text.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² N.L.Geisler and W.E.Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (1968; reprint, Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) p.367. See also Grudem for further evidence that the minimal variants have no impact on any major doctrine, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1994) p.96.

¹⁹³ P.Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2002) p.210 (emphasis mine). (See also the Westminster Confession of Faith 1:8) The basic distinction between God acting providentially and working miraculously is that providence refers to God’s usual workings and relationship with his world (i.e. he is the one who sends the rain, who causes the grass to grow, sustains the world etc.) whereas the miraculous refers more to unusual workings of God within his world. For further discussion on the topic, see Grudem’s chapter on miracles in his *Systematic Theology*. ch.17.

¹⁹⁴ In this sense, we could draw a parallel with God and the work of healing. Though he has the power to heal anyone and everyone, for some reason unbeknown to men, he chooses not to heal all.

¹⁹⁵ N.L.Geisler and W.E.Nix, *General Introduction*, pp.32-33, see also H.Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) p.36 and the early Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) p.83.

¹⁹⁶ J.Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (London: Tyndale Press, 1972) p.186.

¹⁹⁷ Bahnsen, “The Autographa”, p.169. ‘Infallibility’ has been defined more loosely recently as ‘being true in all matters of faith and practise’. Using this definition and given what we have asserted about our Bibles today, it would be fair to say of the Bibles we have *today* that they are infallible. However, in usual terminology, both ‘inerrancy’ and ‘infallibility’ have been reserved for reference to the autographs, so to speak of (today’s) Bibles as infallible may lead to confusion.

2. The Bible is inerrant *in all that it affirms and intends to say* (Not everything it *records* is true)

This clarification is closely tied to hermeneutics, the reader having to discern what the author(s) of Scripture are merely *recording*, and what they are actually *asserting* as true. Scripture records words spoken by people such as Pharaoh, the Pharisees and even Satan where these people are speaking lies. All these words are part of God's word because God is the ultimate author of the book. However these utterances are never affirmed. The reader has to carefully ask, "What point is the author making / wanting to assert in this passage?"

A lot of problems that arise due to the above ultimately reduce to whether people are actually reading Scripture properly or not, and whether or not they are paying close attention to biblical context and genre. This particular writer has had many conversations with people confused as to why the Bible only permits marriage between *one* man and *one* woman but then speaks of kings such as David and Solomon having lots of wives. The simple answer is that the Bible *does* only permit marriage between one man and one woman (Gen 2:24-25; Eph 5:22-33; 1 Tim 3:2, 12¹⁹⁸), and the fact that David and Solomon had many wives is *recorded* in the narrative *but never affirmed* as something good. In fact, for Solomon (in particular), it is hinted at that it is a very bad thing, but this is only noticed when the reader understands how to read narrative sections of Scripture and when it is read in context of both the books of Kings and Chronicles - otherwise the hints are not picked up.

¹⁹⁸ In the first two sets of these verses, wife and husband are singular (in fact its always singular in the Bible when referring to God's desire for a married relationship) and the 1 Timothy verses have been included because a leader is supposed to be an example to others of how God wants a Christian to live.

Inerrancy has to do with what is *asserted* in Scripture.¹⁹⁹ Schildenberger offers a helpful summary:

[...though something recorded in Scripture may be false, it is not an assertion of the Bible.] The inspired writer did not intend his words to be understood in that meaning. Though the words in themselves can have this meaning which is false, it is not the meaning intended by the writer, and therefore not the meaning of the Bible. The Bible is entirely free from error to the extent that the meaning intended by the writer is free from error. Therefore we must speak of an absolute inerrancy of Holy Scripture; for the inerrancy of the Bible is not relative, restricted to one aspect, but rather the manifold significance which words and sentences can have in themselves is restricted by the inspired writer to the one sense intended by him.²⁰⁰

Closely related to the above is the issue of the *language* the authors of Scripture used to describe what they were saying. The writers used both the language of different genres, and the language of the day to describe certain phenomena. Examples of genre language are quite clear; it appears throughout Scripture particularly in poems, proverbs and apocalyptic sections where the language of metaphors and similes are used constantly. But examples of where writers use the language of the day create much more controversy. In the Bible the sun is described as coming up and going down (Josh 10:12-14; Jas 1:11). The Bible also pictures the universe as being like a house in which the earth is the ground floor (which stands on pillars [1 Sam 2:8] and has foundations [Job 38:4]), heaven the first floor (which is divided from the earth by a solid firmament [which acts as a ceiling for the earth {Gen 1:8}, this firmament also acting as the floor for heaven {Ex 24:10}]), and Sheol, or Hades, the cellar (the pit into which the dead go down [Ps 55:15]). The Bible also pictures water as being stored in heaven above the firmament (Gen 1:7; Ps 148:4), and rain starts and stops

¹⁹⁹ With this in mind then (though this needs to be said carefully), the Bible could be said to contain errors – the errors spoken by those speaking lies and making mistakes (other instances would be Job's advisors, Babylonian kings etc).

²⁰⁰ J.Schildenberger, *Vom Geheimnis des Gotteswortes* (Heidelberg: Kerle, 1950) p.77 cited in B.Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (London: Hutchinson, 1972) pp.141-2.

accordingly as holes are opened and closed in the celestial roof (the windows of heaven [Gen 7:11]). Or it is often said the Bible thinks of man's consciousness as diffused throughout his whole physical structure, so that each part of him is an independent centre of thought and feeling (so his bones speak [Ps 35:10], his bowels yearn [Gen 43:30], his ear judges [Job 12:11], his kidneys instruct him by night [Ps 16:7] etc.²⁰¹) These are often objected to as being unscientific, contrary to what is known from science today. Out of all the pictures above, the best known is that of the sun rising and falling (because of the Church's infamous blunder with the findings of Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo) - the objection being framed along the lines of "we know that actually the sun does not 'rise' and 'fall', it stays where it is and the earth revolves." But, by way of reply, it needs to be pointed out that from the standpoint of the human, it does appear that the sun rises and falls – in fact the very phrase is still used today to describe what is happening. Scripture does not set out to be a science text book (this will be looked at below), so on its own terms, this (sometimes described as) phenomenological²⁰² standpoint does not negate inerrancy. With the other descriptions, Vawter's question provides a helpful distinction: "Had the inspired writer affirmed a set of words as literally true, or had he employed popular stories, myths, legends, etc. in order to illustrate something else entirely that he did want to say?"²⁰³ Packer's comment serves as a comprehensive answer:

It may be doubted whether these forms of speech were any more 'scientific' in character and intent than modern references to the sun rising or light-headedness, or walking on air, or one's heart sinking into one's boots, would be. It is much likelier that they were simply standard pieces of imagery, which the writers utilized, and sometimes heightened for poetic effect, without a thought of what they would imply for cosmology and physiology if taken literally. And language means no more than it is used to mean. In any case, what the writers are concerned to tell us in the passages where they use these forms of

²⁰¹ Adapted from Packer, *Fundamentalism*, p.97 fn 2.

²⁰² I.e. from the human standpoint.

²⁰³ Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, p.140.

speech is not the inner structure of the world and men, but the relation of both to God.²⁰⁴

And with the above in mind, Packer comments that:

We must draw a distinction between the *subjects* about which the Bible speaks and the *terms* in which it speaks of them. The biblical authors wrote of God's sovereignty over His world, and of man's experiences within that world, using such modes of speech about the natural order and human experience as were current in their days, and in a language that was common to themselves and their contemporaries. This is saying no more than that they wrote to be understood. Their picture of the world and things in it is not put forward as normative for later science, any more than their use of Hebrew and Greek is put forward as a perfect model for composition in these languages.²⁰⁵

All this is to say, that Scripture needs to be read carefully, and that when speaking of inerrancy, we are speaking specifically about what Scripture affirms.

A more nuanced definition of Inerrancy

After the lengthy discussions above, we now have two essential clarifications of what we are speaking of when referring to an inerrant Bible: we are actually referring to the original manuscripts, and we are speaking about what the Bible affirms. These are legitimate clarifications; ones that any scholar should want to apply to any ancient book. But these clarifications must be laid out clearly as part of the definition. So the rough definition of inerrancy needs to be developed in light of these to read *Inerrancy means that the Scriptures, in their original autographs and when interpreted*

²⁰⁴ Packer, *Fundamentalism*, p.97 fn 2.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp.96-97 (emphasis mine). M.J.Erickson makes a distinction between what he calls 'absolute inerrancy' by which he means that the writers intended to give detailed scientific and historical information, which must therefore be entirely accurate; and 'full inerrancy', which regards many historical and scientific references as phenomenological – the way they appear to the empirical eye and are therefore not historically or scientifically precise. The writers faithfully recorded how the world appeared to them, and this accounts for possible differences between biblical statements and scientific findings. (*Christian Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983], 1:221-40 cited in Bloesch, *Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* [Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994] p.37 fn 21.) This is a fairly helpful distinction, but no thoughtful scholar ever does want to affirm that Scripture sets out to be a comprehensive science book on the things it touches on so it is questionable whether it is necessary.

according to the intended sense, are entirely true and trustworthy in everything that they affirm.

We have now completed the phase of deduction from our method and achieved the beginnings of a solid definition of inerrancy. But this is certainly not the finished product. Rather the second phase of induction must now be employed, to see how this definition may need to be refined yet further.

Second phase of Induction

With the above definition of inerrancy in mind, a second look at individual verses of Scripture draws attention to the following issues, all of which either need to alter our definition in some way, or alternatively it needs to be shown why they do not.

(a) In Scripture, there are a number of examples of unusual / incorrect grammar, syntax or spelling

It should be remembered (from chapter 3) that the Bible is God's word written by human writers. Some of these human writers (i.e. Paul and Luke) clearly had literary gifts and therefore used elegant grammar, syntax and spelling. However, some (e.g. Mark and John) did not (and did not have the educated background Luke and Paul had), so their writing is not as polished. For example, we see examples of unconventional grammar in Mark's gospel and Revelation (e.g. Mk 3:7-8; Rev 3:10) or we see how Mark spells "Eloi" with an o instead of "Eli" as Matthew does (cf. Mk 15:34 and Mt 27:46).

Nevertheless, this in no way negates inerrancy because inerrancy is to do with *truth*. If I said, "I is going to the shops", that's a perfectly true sentence even though it is not

quite the correct grammar “I am going to the shops.” So as long as the incorrect grammar / spelling / syntax do not lead the reader to understand something contrary to what is true, then there is no problem with having ‘errors’ of literacy in the Bible.²⁰⁶

As the definition above states, inerrancy is to do with truthfulness of the content.

(b) The Bible does not necessarily give an exhaustive account of everything that happened in the situations it describes

This is quite obvious, but is sometimes brought as an objection to inerrancy so is helpful to expound briefly. For their own purposes in writing, the authors of Scripture often choose to document certain details but omit others. This is evident from all of the gospel accounts, or the difference of detail recorded in the books of Kings and books of Chronicles, where certain material was used but some discarded. For example, different gospels record different sayings of Jesus on the cross. In total we discover there were seven sayings, but the evangelists only document those that were

²⁰⁶ This is a helpful corrective against the more docetic view of Scripture and brings out the human side of inspiration. Whilst on the subject, the argument, ‘it is human to err, Scripture is written by humans, therefore it errs’ has grown particularly since Vawter’s book. His exact comment is “A human literature containing no error would indeed be a contradiction in terms, since nothing is more human than to err” (*Biblical Inspiration*, p.169). Pinnock in his earlier work gave a better account – even if it was human to err, God gave the Scripture by the miracle of inspiration so that it does not err (C.Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, p.176). Vawter’s point does not stand for a couple of other reasons: (1) because it is possible to write a book that does not err. Maths textbooks, or phonebooks and novels would be good examples, and (2) actually biblically, it is not a requirement of a human that s/he errs. Unfortunately, despite these critiques, Vawter’s view is becoming more and more prominent, so to expose the fallacy fully, it is worth giving Carson’s response in full: “Error...is distinguishable from sin and can be the result of nothing more than human finitude. The question is whether it is error that is essential to humanness, or finitude. If the latter, it is difficult to see why Scripture would be any less ‘human’ if God so superintended its writing that no error was committed. Human beings are always finite; but it does not follow they are always in error. Error does not seem to be essential to humanness. But if someone wishes to controvert the point, then to be consistent that person must also insist that between the Fall and the new heaven and the new earth, not only error but *sinfulness* is essential to humanness. No writer of Scripture escaped the sinfulness of his fallen nature while composing what came to be recognized as Holy Writ: does this mean that the humanness of Scripture entails not only error but sinfulness? And if not, why not? Who wishes to say Scripture is sinful? This is not mere *reduction ad absurdum*: rather, it is a way of showing that human beings who in the course of their lives inevitably err and sin do not necessarily err and sin in any particular circumstance. Their humanness is not compromised when they fail to err or sin. By the same token, a God who safeguards them from error in a particular circumstance – namely, the writing of Scripture – has not thereby vitiated their humanness.” (D.Carson, “Recent Developments in the doctrine of Scripture” in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, D.A.Carson and J.D.Woobdridge (eds.) (Leicester: IVP 1986) pp.27-28 (emphasis his).

of particular use to their purposes in writing. So (b) does not change the definition of inerrancy either because an account does not have to be exhaustive to still be true.

(c) The Bible (particularly in the gospels) often uses ‘ipsissima vox’ rather than ‘ipsissima verba’

This means that, like all ancient writers, the Bible’s human writers (particularly the evangelists) felt free to paraphrase a person’s words (giving the ipsissima vox – the sense of what they said), rather than quote them directly (giving the ipsissima verba – the exact words) as we would expect if we were reading a newspaper today. In ancient times, they did not have quotation marks so the accepted way was to paraphrase what a person said, often bringing out certain points that *the author* (who wrote down what was said) wanted to emphasise. This explains why in the discourses of the gospels, there are slight differences in wording; it is the evangelists drawing out different nuances from a person’s speech for their own purposes in writing their gospels. This would only negate the definition of inerrancy above if the writers were stretching (for example) Jesus’ words to mean something they could not have originally meant, but if this were the case, there would not have been any point in quoting him in the first place.²⁰⁷ So the ipsissima vox / verba issue does not affect the definition either.

(d) The Bible is inerrant in what it speaks of *but not always precise in the details*

This has already been mentioned above but needs to be clarified. The Bible makes no claim to be a science textbook, a manual on botany, a historical journal for academia or anything like that. It claims to be written to lead people to salvation in Christ Jesus

²⁰⁷ I am aware that there is a school of thought that pushes this to extremes and advocates that the evangelists did not record Jesus’ words at all, rather they put words on his lips to give their own agendas more weight. Although it is important to state that the evangelists did take Jesus’ words and use them for their own purposes, to say - as this school says – that they are making up what he said is going too far. For a rebuttal, see C.Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1987).

(2 Tim 3:15) – that is its purpose.²⁰⁸ So with that in mind, it is right to look for a certain degree of accuracy in Scripture on certain historical or scientific details, however not exact precision because it does not claim to be a book in which we would expect that precision. It has already been seen that in Scripture certain phenomena are described from a (from what we know of science today) human standpoint, but there are also examples of imprecision in numbers, again particularly in the books of Kings and Chronicles. An army can be described as having 8,000 people in it. This statement is still true even if actually there are only 7,892 soldiers – the number has just been rounded up to make it clearer for the reader to grasp. Indeed we do the very same today because often too much precision where it is not required can complicate issues, e.g. if at a party someone asks what my name is, I say Matt. If I was to say Matthew John Churchouse, (a) they would think my response was peculiar and (b) they are only asking for a name by which to call me socially, so my answer will not have helped them much. However, if I was to fill in my full name on a driver's license application and I just wrote Matt, that would be wrong too. So the amount of precision required depends on how much precision is expected by the reader. If Scripture was a census asking for exact numbers of people in the army, to say 8,000 (rather than 7,892) would be an error. And if the Bible was a science text book, it would be an error to say the sun rises and falls, but because Scripture claims to be a book which leads to salvation in Jesus – that is its subject area, and all the other details serve to point us to that end. There is a difference between imprecision and error. This is all to do with reading and interpreting Scripture properly, which is already included in the definition of inerrancy given above, so does not make any further re-working of the definition necessary.

²⁰⁸ Witherington makes the helpful distinction between, “what Scripture *teaches* and what it *touches*” (B. Witherington, *The Living Word of God* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007] p.39 [emphasis mine]).

All the above ([a]-[d]) are issues that have emerged from a second inductive look at Scripture and have sometimes led to people questioning a doctrine of inerrancy. But as was said at the start of this chapter, once inerrancy is defined solidly – and particularly in terms of truth – these issues become mute.

The biggest objection against inerrancy that arises out of a second phase of inductive study is the issue of potentially negating phenomena. This is such a big objection that it will be given two full chapters which follow this one. However, before leaving this chapter, one final objection needs to be addressed. It is often said that the definition of inerrancy laid out above is so qualified that it has become meaningless. But two things need to be said by way of response. Firstly, as should have become clear from this chapter, to define inerrancy as we so far have is not to *qualify* it, but to *clarify* it. These clarifications again are not an apologetic move wanting to keep inerrancy (but in the process having to shave away more and more ground until one is left with next to nothing), but rather stem from the many misunderstandings that people have when thinking about the meaning of inerrancy. Defining carefully is something that every theologian (and every scholar) has to do – this is just something that happens through deeper study of a topic, hence the fairly long definition of inerrancy given above. Secondly, all the clarifications given above are not an example of special pleading to be able to retain the word inerrant for the Bible, but rather are clarifications that would extend to all other writings of ancient history if they were being studied.

A preliminary definition of Inerrancy

So the definition we have arrived at is: *Inerrancy means that the Scriptures, in their original autographs and when interpreted according to the intended sense, are entirely true and trustworthy in everything that they affirm.*

This will be carried into the next chapter but may well have to be revised as the second phase of induction is continued.

Chapter 5: The Phenomena of Scripture (section 1)

Through following the retroductive method, we have arrived at a definition of inerrancy as given at the end of chapter 4 (though recognising that this definition might not yet be complete). However, few are willing to accept this doctrine, even when it is clarified and defined in the way that it has been. This reluctance to accept inerrancy is almost always because of the ‘phenomena’ of Scripture, by which scholars mean the ‘mistakes, errors – statements contrary to fact’ they find in Scripture. The following comments outline such thinking:

Pannenberg: [The traditional doctrine of Inspiration]... disintegrated in the course of time, not so much because theologians turned to other norms of truth than Scripture, but primarily because the idea of a doctrinal unity among all the sentences of Scripture without any contradiction among them, an idea followed from the defense of literal inspiration, could not be defended in the long run. It was falsified by observations of scriptural exegesis.²⁰⁹

Phillips: The inability of discordant data to conclusively test even the historical knowledge inferred from Scripture is evident from the well-known mental gymnastics in which inerrantists take part, thereby avoiding the conclusion that Scripture errs.²¹⁰

The above scholars are arguing that, even despite the best attempts to define a doctrine of inerrancy well, inerrancy is something that is simply falsified by Scriptural exegesis.²¹¹ In their eyes, the only way a person can still believe the doctrine of

²⁰⁹ W.Pannenburg, ‘Theological table talk: On the Inspiration of Scripture’ *Theology Today* 54 (1997) 212.

²¹⁰ T.Phillips, ‘The Argument for Inerrancy: An Analysis’ *JASA* 31 (1979) 86. Phillips’ reference is interesting for two reasons. Firstly his primary aim in mentioning this is to try and shake the classic foundationalism which many inerrantists of the time built their epistemology on. He argues that without this, inerrancy cannot stand. But thirty years on, and with many inerrantists having alternative epistemologies (coherentist, weak foundationalist), his argument has been shown to be empty - foundationalism is not inherent to inerrancy. The second point of interest is that he footnotes the early Pinnock (*A Defence of Biblical Infallibility* [Nutley: New Jersey, 1967] p.19) for support of the strong quote above. Writing in 1979, Phillips was surrounded by questionably weak resolutions to difficulties (Lindsell’s infamous resolutions were fairly contemporary for Phillips), but as will become clear as these chapters go on, were he writing thirty years later, his comment may not have been so strong in light of the scholarship we now have on some of these difficulties.

²¹¹ See further Enns who appears to delight in suggesting interpretations of phenomena which negate inerrancy, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) e.g. pp.54, 72, 79, 92-93, 98.

inerrancy is by ‘bending’ and ‘manipulating’ problem texts to try and force some kind of resolution, allowing them to maintain their belief. This is implied by Phillips’ comment, Barton puts it more blatantly:

[the idea that all phenomena can be reconciled when interpreted correctly is simply]...salvation by hermeneutics.²¹²

One of the most quoted examples to make the point is that of Harold Lindsell, and his book, *The Battle for the Bible*. In that book, Lindsell tries to harmonise the different gospel accounts of Peter’s denial of Jesus, but rather embarrassingly ends up concluding that Peter did not deny Jesus three times (like the gospels say), but (harmonised together,) he actually denied him six times.²¹³ With examples such as this in mind, the accusation of dishonesty is raised against inerrantists for their dubious ‘agenda-driven’ exegesis.²¹⁴

But actually those who deny inerrancy because of the above are wrong to do so for two reasons. Firstly, their method is wrong. As was argued in part 1, one cannot pick difficult verses at random and then conclude that (against no other backdrop of evidence) there are errors in Scripture. To do so would be to follow Beegle’s enumerative inductive method,²¹⁵ which, as has already been exposed, is wrong. Rather these difficult phenomena need to be read in light of the clear teaching

²¹² J.Barton, *People of the Book?* (London: SPCK, 1988) p.6.

²¹³ Craig Blomberg has helpfully redeemed the use of harmonisation from ridicule in his article “Legitimate Harmonization” in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, D.A.Carson and J.D.Woodbridge (eds.) (Leicester: IVP, 1986) pp.139-174.

²¹⁴ See for example Abraham who argues “We must either abandon critical historical study and honestly admit this or we must abandon the theology of inerrancy” (*The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981] pp.27–28). See further Enns, *Inspiration*, p.107 and R.D.Olson ‘Why Inerrancy Doesn’t Matter,’ *The Baptist Standard*, February 3, 2006, Available: http://www.baptiststandard.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4670&Itemid=134 [accessed 7th May 2009] for claims of dishonest exegesis from inerrantists.

²¹⁵ The scientific equivalent of which would be to look at the anomalies from an experiment and try to discard it, rather than investigating the cases which brought about the hypothesis and understanding the anomalies in light of it.

Scripture propounds as to what it is and how it is to be read (see chapters 2-4). So

Montgomery:

To know how to treat biblical passages containing apparent errors or contradictions, we must determine what kind of book the Bible is...And how does one correctly determine the nature and extent of scriptural authority? Not by staring at genealogical difficulties or ancient king-lists as [to use Luther's figure] a cow stares at a new gate, but by going to the Bible's central character, Jesus Christ, who declared himself to be God incarnate by manifold proofs, and observing his approach to Scripture.²¹⁶

It is also worth reminding ourselves of Moreland's applicable quote from the philosophy of science to help us think through the role of the phenomena in our theologising

...studies in the philosophy of science show [that]...Scientists can be rational in believing a hypothesis in the presence of anomalies by treating them as *alleged counter instances* rather than real counter instances. This is true even if some anomaly – considered on its own – would more plausibly be understood as a refuting case of the hypothesis. The scientist is within his epistemic rights to suspend judgment, use *ad hoc* hypotheses, and refuse to give up the hypothesis in the presence of what appears to be a well-confirmed counterexample.²¹⁷

Secondly, those who disregard inerrancy because they are not convinced by the resolutions suggested for the discrepancies that they find, often do so by attacking the straw men. Lindsell's harmonisation of Peter's denials is arguably poor, and unfortunately, there are many other solutions put forward that are of a similar quality,²¹⁸ but proper academic practise is not to attack the straw men,²¹⁹ but rather to engage with the strongest and best resolutions put forward.

²¹⁶ J.W.Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1970) p.358 cited in C.Pinnock, "Limited Inerrancy" in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, J.W.Montgomery (ed.) (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974) p.152.

²¹⁷ Moreland, 'Rationality of Belief in Inerrancy', 83-84 (emphasis his).

²¹⁸ A scan through the internet will quickly highlight this.

²¹⁹ As Enns repeatedly does, *Inspiration*, e.g. pp.47, 49.

So as we continue on in this chapter and the next, we shall examine some of these difficult phenomena and look at the best resolutions put forward to see if they genuinely alleviate the discrepancies or not. However, as has already been said, we must accept that even if there are some discrepancies which we cannot resolve, these will not falsify inerrancy because of what Moreland said above, though they may mean that the definition of inerrancy given at the end of chapter 4 will have to be revised.²²⁰

Principally, in Scripture we find two types of difficulties, internal ones (those that appear to contradict something else said in Scripture) and external ones (those that appear to contradict some fact known about from history, science, geography, archaeology, etc.). Obviously in a book the size of the Bible not every single discrepancy can be investigated, but what we can do is take a selection of them to work through as a test-case. So in this and the next chapter, seven of the most well known discrepancies in the gospels will be taken (the seven selected are a mixture of both internal and external difficulties), to see if there are any decent, reasonable, scholarly explanations which alleviate the difficulties. The seven are taken from the gospels as a test-case, on the grounds that with four accounts recording the same story (although in different ways), this would be the most likely place to find a contradiction.²²¹

²²⁰ The question as to when an inerrantist would admit that inerrancy has been falsified is an interesting one. For treatment of the issue, see the Appendix. The reader is also recommended Pinnock's "Limited Inerrancy", p.155 and Moreland, 'Rationality', 86.

²²¹ The gospels are one of nine areas that Sparks suggests inerrantists will have problems with in terms of biblical criticism (The nine being [1] the Pentateuch [authorship, chronological errors, sources, etc.]; [2] Israelite historiography [which does not offer "perfectly accurate histories of events as they unfolded in ancient Israel" {p.104}]; [3] Isaiah [multiple authorship]; [4] Ezekiel's Tyre prophecy [unfulfilled]; [5] the Gospels [various perceived historical or theological contradictions]; [6] Pastorals [authorship]; [7] prophecy in Daniel and Revelation; [8] the Bible's theological and ethical diversity; and [9] exegetical method in the Bible.) (K.L.Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008] chapter 3). [1]-[4] are Old Testament references so have not been chosen recognising that Jesus and the New Testament writers would have been aware of

I have divided up the seven into three groups, class A, B and C in terms of difficulty according roughly to how much has been written about them in order to relieve the discrepancy (i.e. if commentaries are not overly concerned that there is an issue, it is categorised as class C, if there are pages, and articles given over to trying to relieve them, it is placed into class A). Each difficulty will be discussed and weighed in light of the best scholarship on it, and then the chapters will be concluded with some kind of comments as to how satisfactory these solutions are.

The seven well know phenomena are:

Class C	Class B	Class A
The parable of the mustard seed (Mt 13:32)	Zechariah son of Jehoiada (Mt 23:35)	Staff / no staff (Mt 10:10; Mk 6:8; Lk 9:3)
Red robe / purple robe (Mt 27:28; Mk 15:17; Jn 19:2)	Differing chronologies between the synoptics and John's gospel	
	Abiathar 'the High Priest' (Mark 2:26)	
	The census, Quirinius (Lk 2:2)	

There are obviously more than these in the gospels that scholars might take issue with, but these will serve as a good spread of the usual problem passages.

Class C

The parable of the mustard seed

Not until the nineteen-sixties did anyone have an issue with Jesus' parable of the mustard seed. However, in 1968, Daniel Fuller wrote an article in the Bulletin of the

these difficulties yet still these issues do not dent their confidence in the truthfulness of those texts; [5] has been touched on in chapter 3 (but the reader is recommended a discussion of the issues in W.D., Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] or G.K.Knight *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992]); and [7], [8] and [9], not being specific phenomena but more 'categories', make them too broad a subject to investigate here. This leaves the most interesting sixth category, the problems in the gospels.

Evangelical Theological Society drawing attention to Mt 13:31-32: *He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."* (ESV) Fuller, in trying to argue that at times in Scripture, God accommodated himself to the language of his hearers, argued that in the study of botany, actually there is a smaller seed than the mustard seed – that of the orchid seed, yet Jesus in verse 32 had clearly affirmed that the mustard seed was the smallest seed. Had Jesus affirmed an ‘insignificant’ detail as true which was actually false?

One initial attempt to resolve this argued that “smallest” could actually mean something along the lines of “among the smallest”, however μικρότερον is clearly superlative (not just comparative), so this resolution does not work. However, the difficulty is resolved when the reader understands what the word “seed” (σπέρμα) meant to the original hearers. Rather than σπέρμα meaning “*any* seed”, (as we might [though not in all cases] understand it), when spoken of in the first century – the context being an agricultural setting - Jesus’ hearers would have understood it to mean a seed that was sown, i.e. a crop seed.²²² The proverbial smallness of the mustard seed is evident from Mt 17:20 / Lk 17:6 (as well as Leviticus Rabbah 24:2) and the reference being to a *sowed* seed is also evident from the parable of the sower at the start of Mt 13 (v.3) where again Jesus uses the example of seed in the context of sowing.²²³ So Fuller’s mistake was to read into the word “seed” connotations he had for the word as a 20th century reader, rather than exegeting carefully what the word

²²² Source: W.Grudem in his lecture ‘The Authority of the Bible’ Brighton, summer 2006. The NIV has therefore helpfully translated verse 32 as “Though it is the smallest of all *your* seeds...”

²²³ See further Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977 rpt.) p.215 for how the word “seed” would have been understood.

would have meant in its first century setting. To understand Jesus as speaking of a *crop seed* relieves the difficulty because the mustard seed genuinely is the smallest of all crop seeds.

Red robe / purple robe?

The other class C discrepancy is the colour of Jesus' robe when he is being mocked by the Roman soldiers during his trial. Again, not many scholars have a problem with this (though the polemical websites have sensationalised it). However, it is useful to see how it is resolved. In Mk 15:17, Mark states that, "They [the Roman soldiers] put a purple robe on him [Jesus] then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him." And again, in Jn 19:2: "The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe..." However, in Mt 27:28, we read, "They stripped him and put a *scarlet* robe on him..." What colour was the robe they put on him?²²⁴ Calvin recognised the difference and wrote "...we need not sweat over this. It is not likely that Christ was dressed in a purple robe: we may gather it was not real purple but something that had a resemblance to it, as a painter imitates the real thing in his pictures."²²⁵ This goes some way towards resolving the discrepancy, in that we can envisage John (in his deeply ironic account of the crucifixion) and Mark wanting to speak of a 'purple' robe as opposed to an actual purple one, however, it does not relieve the difficulty entirely. Calvin is right that it is unlikely that a bleeding beaten Jesus would have had a rich purple robe put on him, mainly because of the cost. Purple was a colour of royalty, a colour which the emperor or a king would

²²⁴ When this issue was drawn to the author's attention, he found great amusement looking at some of the attempted resolutions on certain websites - the most amusing being the idea that actually Jesus' robe was both scarlet and purple because it was patterned – probably striped, or perhaps even chequered!

²²⁵ J. Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980 rpt.) p.190.

wear. The dye was very valuable, it being manufactured in a long and costly process beginning by gathering the secretion of the purple snail,²²⁶ and one which only the very richest could afford. So Matthew's gospel probably gives a more exact record – one could easily imagine the soldiers finding an old, tired red robe (one which the military would wear) to serve as a parody for the emperors purple robe. This mocking becomes more vivid when we read of the other items Jesus is given – a crown of thorns to parody a king's crown, and a flimsy reed to mimic a king's sceptre. So whereas John and Mark give the colour that the robe was supposed to imitate, Matthew gives the colour that it actually was. Further light is shed on the discrepancy when we learn that the colours of scarlet and purple were more closely associated than what we think of today as scarlet and purple. Through looking at other indications of the colours scarlet and purple in the Bible, it is discovered that the two colours are often listed side by side (Exodus 25:4; 26:1, 31, 36; 27:16; 28:5, 6, 8, 15, 33; 35:6, 23, 25, 35; 36:8, 35, 37; 38:18, 23; 39:1-3, 5, 8, 24, 29; 2 Chronicles 2:7, 14; 3:14; Rev 17:4; 18:12, 16) seeming that often when one term was appropriate as a description, the other colour was also. Barnes clarifies saying that the ancients²²⁷ gave the name purple to any colour that has a mixture of red in it.²²⁸ In fact, the BAGD adduces a reference in which a Roman soldier's cloak is said to be "purple".²²⁹ Both words were used to indicate royalty.

²²⁶ U.Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) p. 514.

²²⁷ The primary reference he cites being the biblical communities – see verses above.

²²⁸ A.Barnes, *Notes on the gospels of Matthew and Mark, explanatory and practical* (Edinburgh: Gall and Inglis, 1870) (no page number given) cited on (no author or date given) *Answering the Atheist*, Available: www.lookinguntoJesus.net/ata20051211.htm (Accessed 22nd January 2008).

²²⁹ BAGD, p.694.

Class B

Zechariah son of Jehoiada?

In the passage commonly known as the seven woes on the Pharisees, Jesus is denouncing the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. After the seventh woe, Jesus (in Matthew's gospel) says to them (Mt 23:33ff), *"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you the prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barakiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation."* The issue for the exegete is: who is Zechariah son of Barakiah? There is a Zechariah son of Barakiah – the minor prophet (Zech 1:1), but with no evidence of him being murdered, and there was a Zechariah son of Jehoiada (2 Chron 24:20-22) who was murdered but in this case, the father's name clearly is not Barakiah. Has Jesus (or Matthew) incorrectly presented the fact and confused the two different Zechariahs in trying to make the point? Luke's equivalent of this passage (11:40-51) omits "righteous" and "son of Barakiah" which might imply that it was Matthew who misrepresented the facts...

The context shows that the judgment, "from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barakiah" (Mt 23:35) - representing all the scope of righteous blood from beginning to end – was to come on the Pharisees. The reference to Abel echoes the story of the first ever murder, and one in which Genesis speaks of Abel's blood "crying out to God from the ground" (Gen 4:10) which neatly fits the context of Jesus speaking judgment against the Pharisees. Depending on who we

identify Zechariah as would determine what the scope of righteous blood is – whether it is chronological or canonical. Who is this Zechariah?

A number of different alternatives have been put forward. (a) This is Zechariah the father of John the Baptist, who was a priest. This would make the scope of righteous blood a chronological one - right from the very first murder to the most recent in Jesus' time of a righteous man – the Pharisees were guilty of all these murders (and would eventually be guilty of the murder of Jesus the ultimate prophet). The problem with this solution is there is no conclusive evidence of John the Baptist's father being martyred.²³⁰ (b) It is Zechariah the son of Baris whom Jewish zealots murdered in the Jewish uprising prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.²³¹ Again this would make the scope chronological up to the last martyr before judgment came upon Jerusalem - Jesus' assertion being made in the prophetic perfect tense. The argument given for advancing this solution is that it would have been the Pharisees themselves who would be responsible for this murder, making sense of Jesus' words, "*whom you murdered*". However, there is no evidence that this Zechariah was murdered as a martyr or that he was killed between the temple and the altar (unless he had been a priest – again for which there is no evidence) and Jesus' wording "whom you murdered" appears to refer both to Zechariah's and Abel's murder – it is as though the Pharisees themselves were receiving the judgment for both. (c) This is a Zechariah that we have no record of. This is possible, but no reason is given to believe this option (d) As was mentioned above, this is Zechariah the minor prophet (son of Barakiah [Zech 1:1]). Gundry points out that Matthew's quoting Zech 11:12-13 in relation to "innocent blood", "the price of blood" and "the field of blood" in 27:3-10

²³⁰ I have changed the word murdered to martyred here because there is evidence that Herod killed John the Baptist's father – however, this would not be blood which the Pharisees would be guilty of.

²³¹ We learn this from the writings of Josephus, *War* 4.334-44.

would fit very neatly the context of it being this Zechariah,²³² but again, there is no evidence of this prophet being killed. (e) The Zechariah son of Jehoiada would also fit the context satisfactorily. (Moreover, if we were to read the parallel in Luke, this would be the natural conclusion) He *was* murdered in the courtyard of the temple (2 Chron 24:20-22) and this would make the scope of righteous blood a canonical one (the Hebrew Bible at that time ended with 2 Chronicles – it would be the equivalent of Christians saying, ‘from Genesis to Revelation’). This Zechariah’s dying words were “May Yahweh hear and avenge” (2 Chron 24:22) which would be in line with the blood of Abel also crying out. But, this Zechariah’s father is Jehoiada. (f) Gundry combines (d) *and* (e) drawing attention to the Jewish tradition which he thinks is a deliberate²³³ interpretive equation of Zechariah the son of Barakiah and the priest Zechariah whose murder is reported in 2 Chronicles.²³⁴ So both the contexts surrounding those two Zechariahs fit neatly. Whilst this is possible, in my opinion it seems unlikely.

Of all the above, most commentators would say that it is option (e) that makes most sense. The solution possibly being that, just as Zechariah the minor prophet’s patronymic is given in Zech 1:1, and his grandfathers in Ezra 6:14, so it is possible that Jehoiada was the *grandfather* of the Zechariah in 2 Chronicles and the father is unnamed in Scripture. The suggestion carries some weight when we discover that Jehoiada lived to be 130 (2 Chron 24:15) and that Zechariah’s ministry followed Jehoiada’s death. This would allow for a father called Barakiah to bring up Zechariah, live a long life, but die before the death of his own father leaving him no opportunity

²³² R.H.Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) p.497.

²³³ Some think this is confusion, but the likelihood of Jesus - a well-known Jewish rabbi - not knowing of this confusion then accidentally dropping it into conversation is unlikely. The possibility that it was Matthew who confused it, is again unlikely.

²³⁴ Gundry, *Matthew*, p.497.

to serve as chief priest. The timing would correspond, but this resolution would have to be put down to an oral tradition of which Matthew knew, as opposed to a Scriptural resolution because there is no record of this Barakiah father in the Old Testament.

The dating of Jesus' death

Towards the later stages of the synoptic gospels, all three indicate that Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples before he went to his death. Mk 14:12, 17-18 and Lk 22:15²³⁵ demonstrate this quite clearly, and the date of them eating the meal would be Friday 15th Nisan. (The days beginning at sundown – so in that year, the Passover ran from what would be for us about 6pm on Thursday to 6pm on Friday²³⁶) However, five verses in John's gospel have convinced most scholars that John records them eating their meal together the night before - the 14th Nisan, drawing the synoptic and Johannine chronology into sharp contradiction. The five verses in John are

13:1 (where in verse 2 Jesus and his disciples are eating a meal): *"It was (just) before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father...etc.*

18:28 (Jesus having been arrested after eating a meal with his disciples): *"Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.*

19:14 (After the above): *"It was the day of Preparation of the Passover, about the sixth hour"* (when Jesus was crucified)

19:31: *"Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath..."*

19:42: *"Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was near by, they laid Jesus there."*

²³⁵ Mk 14: ¹²"On the first day of the Feast of unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him 'Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?'...¹⁷When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table...etc." and Lk 22:15: "And he [Jesus] said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.'"

²³⁶ Cf. C.K.Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1978) p.48.

It is usually suggested that John has adjusted the chronology in order to have Jesus dying on the cross on the day the Passover lambs were to be slain (cf. 19:14), however, that would mean that he has actually compromised real history in order to make a theological point. Is this accurate? Brown describes this as “the most disputed calendric question in the New Testament.”²³⁷

A closer examination of the verses above shows that actually, John’s chronology is the same as that of the synoptics. It is generally taken that Jn 13:1 acts as a kind of title to the second part of the gospel (at least to chapter 17),²³⁸ then verse 2 functions as a sub-title to the foot-washing of chapter 13.²³⁹ Those (cf. Lindars²⁴⁰, Barrett²⁴¹, Dodd²⁴² and Schnackenburg²⁴³) who think that John has adjusted the timings, try to argue that 13:1 - linked with the rest of chapter 13 - implies that the meal they are eating in chapter 13 is *before* the Passover, and then proof that the meal is not a Passover is given by the way John seemingly avoids calling it the Passover meal. But (as the NIV helpfully makes clear), John uses the word $\pi\rho\acute{o}$ – “just before” to describe the timing of the meal. Ridderbos comments “ $\pi\rho\acute{o}$ here does not imply indeterminate duration or stress that the feast had not yet occurred. It emphasizes, rather, the feast’s imminence.”²⁴⁴ And the meal of verse 2 gives subtle hints that

²³⁷ R.E.Brown, *The Gospel according to John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, vol. 2 (New York: Geoffrey Chapman / Doubleday, 1966-71) pp.555ff.

²³⁸ For example, see R.Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London and Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1975) vol. 3. p.16, Brown’s breakdown of the gospel in his commentary, *Gospel according to John*, and H.Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. J.Vriend (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997) pp.451-2 who notes that “ἡγάπησεν refers not only to Jesus’ love as a state of mind but also to the concrete expression of this love in the footwashing and in his self-giving ‘to the end’ (fn 4). See also W.K.Grossouw, ‘A note on John XIII 1-3’ *Novum Testamentum* 8 (1966) 124-31.

²³⁹ Ridderbos comments, “Thus, as in the Synoptics, the meal referred to in 13:2 is the opening act of the story of Jesus’ death” (*Gospel according to John*, p.451).

²⁴⁰ B.Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants, 1972) p.448.

²⁴¹ Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*, pp.48-51.

²⁴² C.H.Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) p.234.

²⁴³ Schnackenburg, *Gospel according to St. John*, pp.264-5.

²⁴⁴ Ridderbos, *Gospel according to John*, p.452 fn 2.

although it is not named as such, it actually is a Passover meal; it being a festal meal taking place in Jerusalem at a late hour, verse 29, some of the disciples assume Judas left in order to distribute alms (a tradition commonly done on the night of Passover)²⁴⁵. Also, the similarity of the incident of the bread dipping in 13:26 with Mk 14:18-21 is worthy of note. So Ridderbos observes, “It is natural to understand v.2 as referring to the Passover meal”²⁴⁶ and even Brown affirms that: “That there are Passover characteristics in the meal even in John is undeniable.”²⁴⁷ The reason John does not call the meal the Passover is most likely because he wrote to compliment the synoptics and assumes his readers would have been familiar with the tradition that the meal Jesus shared with his disciples was the Passover, so he simply calls it “the evening meal” (see also 21:20). This verse, in all fairness, is not usually one that sways scholars either way on the chronology – it is more of a neutral verse. The references above that do tend to sway scholars towards the argument of John changing the chronology are the latter four. In particular, 18:28 and 19:14. Leaving 18:28 aside for a moment, in 19:14 (as mentioned above) it appears that John has sidelined history for the sake of making a theological point to make clear that Jesus on the cross is dying as *the* sacrificed Passover lamb (at the time the priests in the temple were sacrificing all the Passover lambs - Thursday the 14th). Support is found for this in that Jesus being the sacrificial lamb is a theme found regularly through John’s gospel (1:29; 2:13, 23; 6:4). However, Carson argues that (a) John’s reference to Jesus being on the cross at the sixth hour (our midday) still would not be consistent with the timing of the sacrificing of the lambs which was between the ninth and eleventh hour (our 3-5pm) and (b) if John did want to make a theological point about the timing,

²⁴⁵ Note also the evidence from 1 Cor 11:23ff “...The Lord Jesus, *on the night he was betrayed*, took bread...etc”

²⁴⁶ See also E.Behm, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, G.W.Bromiley (trans. and ed.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76) vol. 2, p.34.

²⁴⁷ Brown, *Gospel according to John*, p.556. (see also B.Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, pp.445ff.)

surely after verse 16 would be a better place to insert the timing. He concludes, “John does not in these chapters draw attention to the slaughter of the lambs, nor does he refer to Jesus as the true lamb of God.”²⁴⁸ Dodd, too, acknowledges that it is “somewhat strange he [John] has not said anything to call attention to this synchronism.”²⁴⁹ The final and biggest factor in 19:14²⁵⁰ (and the other difficult references in chapter 19) that demonstrates that John has not changed the timing is to do with his description παρασκευὴ τοῦ πάσχα – “the day of preparation for the Passover.” Scholars (noted above) who think John has Jesus dying on the 14th of Nisan assume that this is a reference to the day before Passover day, locating 19:14, 31 and 42 on the Thursday. However, παρασκευὴ is actually a technical term for the day preceding the *Sabbath*, also called “the day before the Sabbath” (cf. Mk 15:42²⁵¹). Ridderbos asserts, “Use of it for the day before Passover is not known.”²⁵² So John’s reference to timing has to be to the Friday – especially as 19:31 describes the coming Sabbath as a μεγάλη ἡμέρα – “a special day” (being because it was a Sabbath during Passover and the day the firstfruits were presented [Lev 23:11]). Therefore (as the NIV helpfully highlights) τοῦ πάσχα must be taken here not as “of the Passover”, but “of the Passover Feast” or “of the Passover week”. So convincing is this that even Robinson admits, “Where Mark (15:42) and John (19:31) agree is that Jesus died on the Friday afternoon, the eve of Sabbath.”²⁵³ Carson suggests the reason the day is introduced in these verses is not to associate Jesus with the Passover lambs being

²⁴⁸ D.A.Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1991) pp.456-7.

²⁴⁹ Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p.234.

²⁵⁰ Attention could be drawn to Jn 18:39 – Pilate stating that, it being the Passover, it was his custom to release to the people a prisoner – for further proof, however, on its own it is not overly conclusive that that particular day was the Friday.

²⁵¹ See also Josephus, *Antiquities*, xvi.163; *Didache* viii.1; and *Martyrdom of Polycarp* vii.1 for external uses of this phrase.

²⁵² Ridderbos, *Gospel according to John*, p.456.

²⁵³ J.A.T.Robinson, *The Priority of John* (London: SCM, 1985) pp.147-8.

slain, but rather that it being a Sabbath the next day (v.31-37) explains why the bodies would have to be taken off the crosses that same day.²⁵⁴

This leaves 18:28. Whilst this is still difficult, it can no longer be regarded as decisive in light of the other four references pertaining to Jesus celebrating Passover on the 15th Nisan. Carson suggests:

it is tempting here to understand *to eat the Passover* to refer, not to the Passover meal itself, but to the continuing Feast of Unleavened bread, which continued for seven days. In particular, attention may be focussed on the *hagigah*, the feast offering offered on the morning of the first full paschal day (cf. Num28:18-19). There is ample evidence that ‘the Passover’ could refer to the combined feast of the paschal meal itself plus the ensuing Feast of Unleavened Bread (e.g. Lk 22:1 ‘Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread called the Passover, was approaching’).²⁵⁵

If Carson is right, the Jewish leaders would have had to have avoided all ritual contamination to be able to eat the entire feast at the correct time. If they had defiled themselves in a way that would mean they were unclean until sundown, they *could* have eaten the Hagigah later on in the week, but being in positions of public status, they would have wanted to avoid having to withdraw from the feast, even if it was for a short period of time.

Whether or not the exegesis of Jn 18:28 just given is right or not, the definite exegesis of the other four verses indicates that John did not change the chronology, and that there is no contradiction between his gospel and the synoptics over the day on which Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover meal – all the gospels speak of them eating it on the Thursday evening (15th Nisan), and have Jesus standing before Pilate, then later executed on the Friday day (which, by the calendars of the time was still the 15th Nisan).

²⁵⁴ Carson, *Gospel of John*, p.604.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p.589.

The resolutions laid out for the four aforementioned discrepancies are the best solutions scholars have suggested for the discrepancies. Though I suggested these discrepancies are towards the easier end of the scale to resolve, it will have become clear that some of the resolutions finalised upon are stronger than others - the Zechariah discrepancy in particular, I personally find rather speculative and less than satisfactory (whereas the other three, in my opinion, resolve quite neatly). This will obviously have implications for our definition of inerrancy and demand further comment, but for now, this will be reserved until we have looked at further discrepancies. These are the discrepancies positioned towards the harder end of the scale to resolve, the remainder of class B and class A.

Chapter 6: The Phenomena of Scripture (section 2)

Class B (continued)

Abiathar 'the high priest'

Jesus, in Mark's gospel, encounters opposition from an early stage. From initial encounters with the Pharisees they accuse him of blasphemy (Mk 2:7) and catch his disciples 'breaking' the Sabbath law (Mk 2:24). It is on this second occasion that in his defence, Jesus reminds the Pharisees of what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need. (Mk 2:26ff) "*When Abiathar was high priest, he [David] entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.*" The issue is this: When David did this, Abiathar was not the high priest, his father, Ahimelech, was. Has Jesus or Mark been erroneous in their statements? The omission of 'Abiathar' by Matthew (12:4) and Luke (6:4) in the parallel accounts might imply that Mark has.

A number of manuscripts of Mark's gospel also omit the reference to Abiathar (D, W, 1009, 1546, it, Syr), so one solution put forward is that this is a gloss inserted by a later copyist. Other manuscripts insert the word τοῦ in before ἀρχιερέως meaning "during the days of Abiathar..." ("who later became high priest") (A, C, Θ, λ, φ). However, the best manuscripts have it straight forwardly ἐπὶ ἀβιαθὰρ ἀρχιερέως. Along the lines of textual critical solutions, Mulholland raises the interesting point that none of the textual variants replaces the name 'Ahimelech' for 'Abiathar'.²⁵⁶

A suggestion connected with the above, is that Ahimelech was also called Abiathar and Abiathar also called Ahimelech. There are a number of people referred to by more than one name in Scripture – e.g. Jacob = Israel, Simon = Cephas. More justification for the above comes from comparing 1 Sam 21:1-9; 22:9-16, 20-22; 23:6-

²⁵⁶ M.R.Mulholland, "Abiathar" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, J.B.Green and S.McKnight (eds.) (Leicester: IVP, 1992) p.1. The relevance is discussed below.

9; 30:7; 2Sam 15:24-36; 17:15; 19:11; 20:25; 1 Kgs 1:7-25; 2:26-27; 4:4 and 1 Chron 15:11 (known as the major tradition [that identifies Abiathar as Ahimelech's son, who{ Ahimelech} gave the bread to David, as priest under David prior to David's kingship and co-priest with Zadok under David's reign]) with 2 Sam 8:17; 1 Chron 18:16; 24:3-31 (known as the minor tradition [which identifies Abiathar as Ahimelech's *father*, and {Abiathar} co-priest with Zadok during David's reign]). That both men were known by both names could be true.²⁵⁷ Many sceptics want to say that the minor tradition has to be an error, however the combination of major and minor tradition, particularly at 2 Sam 8:17 and 1 Chron 15:11, points away from this. Another alternative²⁵⁸ along these lines is that actually the minor tradition is the correct one – the Bible Jesus and Mark had at that time represented the minor tradition (which would mean that it *was* in fact Abiathar who gave David the bread) – and the major tradition we have in Bibles today is actually an adjustment from the autographs.²⁵⁹ This is possible, but given the number of references promoting the major tradition, this seems quite unlikely. The more likely resolution of the above two seems to be the one advocating that Abiathar was also called Ahimelech, and Ahimelech also called Abiathar.

The most accepted solution, however, is what Wenham suggested in the fifties, that English Bibles have mistranslated ἐπὶ ἀβιάθαρ ἀρχιερέως. Wenham questions how,

²⁵⁷ This then could serve as an option (g) for the Zechariah son of Barakiah discrepancy – that Jehoiada was also known as Barakiah. However, unlike the case being discussed, there is not any evidence for this in the Matthew discrepancy.

²⁵⁸ The one, in fact, Mulholland supposes.

²⁵⁹ Mulholland argues that the reference of 1 Chron 15:11 is particularly interesting because the Chronicler, in an otherwise word for word reproduction of 2 Sam 8:15-18 (par. 1 Chron 18:14-17), “retains Ahimelech son of Abiathar as priest with Zadok but changes the role of David's sons from ‘priests’ (in 2 Sam 8:18) to chiefs (in 1 Chron 18:17).” He continues “Such a concern for accuracy regarding the priesthood would seem to require a reversal of Abiathar and Ahimelech to agree with the rest of Samuel and Kings, unless the Chronicler appears not to have been interested in materials prior to the Davidic kingship, retaining only the death of Saul as the historical prelude to David's reign (1 Chron 10). Thus the Chronicler provides no information on the period of David's flight from Saul during which the Ahimelech / Abiathar account occurs. The Chronicler's strong reliance on the minor tradition, however, implies that Abiathar would have been the priest who gave David the bread rather than Ahimelech.” (Mulholland, “Abiathar”, p.1).

with so many of the early sources recognising the ‘error’, we account for the retention of the phrase for so long in the oral tradition – if it is an error. Is it likely that this kind of ‘error’ would go undetected until the time Mark penned his gospel?²⁶⁰ Concluding it to be unlikely, Wenham draws attention to the grammar of the phrase. Unlike the rest of Mark’s gospel where the accusative follows the preposition ἐπὶ, here, as with the only other exception 12:26, it is the genitive. So rather than translating it as “at the time of Abiathar”, Wenham reasons that parallel to the translation of 12:26 “in the account of the burning bush” / “at the passage concerning the burning bush”, we should translate 2:26 with a locative interpretation too, as, “at the passage concerning [or even ‘entitled’] ‘Abiathar the high priest’ because that passage in 1 Sam 21 immediately precedes the first exploits of Abiathar - the better known high priest.”²⁶¹

Since Wenham’s solution, it has been countered by Lagrange and Rogers, who point out that (unlike Mk 12:26) Mk 2:26’s ἐπὶ Ἀβιάθᾳ ἀρχιερέως is separated from “have you not read”, so to compare it as a parallel with 12:26 is illegitimate. They also question whether Abiathar really is the central element in that particular section of 1 Samuel – Abiathar only appearing later in chapter 22 making it unlikely that his name would be given to the section - and also show that in the majority of Tannaitic documents, a section was usually named by a reference which occurs early not late in the section.²⁶² Lagrange’s suggestion is that it is merely Mark having a “manque de memoire” (lack of memory), with him not being overly concerned to give an accurate account of history, concluding “cette approximation est parfaitement suffisante pour le but poursuivi par Jesus” (this suggestion is perfectly sufficient for the aim set out

²⁶⁰ J.Wenham, ‘Mark 2:26’ *JTS* 1 (1950) 156. Again, a similar argument could be applied to the Matthew discrepancy above. Why, if the retention of “son of Barakiah” is an error, is it likely it would have been allowed to be attached to the oral tradition for so long?

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁶² A.D.Rogers, ‘Mark 2:26’ *JTS* 1 (1951) 44. drawing upon M.J.Lagrange, *Evangelie selon Saint Marc* (Paris: J.Gabalda, 1947) pp. 53-55.

by Jesus).²⁶³ However, the underlying misplaced assumption in this statement is that the gospel writers were not overly concerned to write accurate history, they were only concerned to write in a way to win readers to Christ. A growing amount of research is exposing this assumption as being untrue.²⁶⁴ Though Rogers and Lagrange's critiques are valid and certainly need to be answered, they do not properly address Wenham's question, why would such an 'error' – if it is an error – be allowed to survive so long in the oral tradition unless it had sufficient support for being true. And they do not explain the unusual grammatical construction.

Gundry – forty years later answered Roger's and Lagrange's first objection by showing that Jesus has to delay his reference to Abiathar (separating it from "have you never read?") because otherwise it would compete for attention with David's name.²⁶⁵ However, Lagrange's and Roger's other two difficulties with Wenham's solution still stand with no research having yet appeared to counter them. These withstanding, Wenham's solution still remains the best of the suggested solutions; it realistically shows that this is unlikely to be an error because if it was, it would have been exposed before Mark wrote it²⁶⁶, and his suggestion that English Bibles probably do mistranslate 2:26 - incorrectly missing the locative use of ἐν – (though it has [some resolved] problems) makes more sense than translating it as an accusative. So, 2:26 should read, "In the passage concerning Abiathar the high priest, he [Jesus]

²⁶³ Cited in A.D.Rogers, *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁶⁴ For example, R.T.France, D.Wenham and C.Blomberg (eds.), *Gospel Perspectives*, vols. 1-5 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980-86) (the more devotional reduction being C.Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* [Leicester: IVP, 1987]). It should be asked why anyone living at that time would be prepared to believe something that did not have historical backing – i.e. was not rooted in historical fact. Cf. 1 Cor 15:17-19.

²⁶⁵ R.H.Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) pp.141-142.

²⁶⁶ Another interesting question to consider related to this and the Matthean discrepancy above is how the synoptic problem fits in. If we assume Markan priority, then Matthew, although Mark (and Luke) omit the reference "son of Barakiah", must have been very confident that this is fact – because otherwise if he were not sure, it would have been easier to continue following his Marcan source and omit the reference. If we assume Matthean priority, then the same argument would apply to Mark leaving in the reference to Abiathar.

entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”

The Census in Luke 2:2

In Luke’s infancy narrative, he supplies the reader with a number of clues as to the date of Jesus’ birth by mentioning who was in charge of the Roman world at the time. The one of particular interest for us is Lk 2:1-2: *“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.”* Through combining (a) Luke’s reference to the birth of John the Baptist (1:5), (b) Matthew 2 (where we find Jesus was born just before Herod died), and (c) the actual timing of Herod’s death (Finegan reasons that Herod died between 12th March and 11th April, 4 BC), we can reasonably assume that the census Luke speaks of in Lk 2 (during which Jesus was born) happened around 5 BC.²⁶⁷ The issue is though, whether Quirinius was actually governor of Syria at that time.

It is known with certainty (from external history as well as biblical history) that Quirinius was governor of Syria AD 6-7, during which he took *the* famous census which all the Jews remembered (see Acts 5:37), however, there is nothing other than Lk 2:2 to suggest that he was governor of Syria before then. In fact, it has been suggested that he could not have been governor before AD 6-7 because we know from sources such as Josephus and Tacitus, who the governors (also called legates) of Syria were at that time. Fitzmyer gives the following list²⁶⁸:

²⁶⁷ Though the actual fact that a census was taken has in the past been contested, many scholars are now recognising that it was very possible considering the Roman history surrounding Lk 2:1 (e.g. the state of the Roman empire having accomplished victories against other nations, Herod’s declining relationship with Caesar [thus Caesar wanting Herod’s province to swear allegiance to Caesar] etc.)

²⁶⁸ J.Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke (I-IX): Introduction, translation and notes* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) p.403.

M. Agrippa	23-13 BC
M. Titius	ca. 10 BC
S. Sentius Saturninus	9-6 BC
P. Quintilius Varus	6-4 BC
C. Caesar	1 BC – AD 4(?)
L. Volsusius Saturninus	AD 4-5
P. Sulpicius Quirinius	AD 6-7 (or later)
Q. Caecilius Creticus Silanus	AD 12-17

So, it is alleged that Luke's facts and / or his dates are wrong. Fitzmyer, for example, thinks that Luke has confused two big dates in Roman history – the dates 4 BC: the death of Herod followed by disturbances, and AD 6-7: the (famous) census (which Quirinius took) which also marked the birth of the zealot party led by Judas the Galilean. In effect, Fitzmyer thinks that Luke, in adding a reference to Quirinus around the birth of Jesus, has been erroneous in his history by ten years.²⁶⁹

This discrepancy is particularly curious because of Luke's credentials – many scholars (conservative and liberal alike) accepting Luke as one of the most excellent and accurate historians of ancient times.²⁷⁰ Luke in fact states his credentials as a historian in the first four verses of his gospel:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye-witnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

As has been mentioned, Luke's precise attention to detail²⁷¹ elsewhere throughout Luke and Acts seems to agree with his claim in the prologue, so Fitzmyer's suggestion of Luke's inaccurate rendering of history by *ten years* would appear

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p.405.

²⁷⁰ There are many works published on Luke as an historian. Of these, several are happy to accept him as at least as accurate as the other major historians of the time – perhaps even more so. So Blaiklock states: "Luke is a consummate historian, to be ranged in his own right with the great writers of the Greeks." (E.M.Blaiklock, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Cambridge: Tyndale Press, 1959] p.89).

²⁷¹ E.g. his going to considerable lengths to ensure that he refers to Roman officials by their exact titles and the exact sailing nautical details he provides.

incredible – especially so if Theophilus was a man of high Roman standing²⁷² who would have known of the dates and Roman officials involved. Luke being wrong by ten years would undermine his claim in 1:1-4 within a few paragraphs of him writing his gospel. This, plus the fact that Luke actually knew of the famous census in AD 6-7 (Acts 5:37) – note, in the translation above of Lk 2:2 πρώτη is translated “first” (implying that Luke knew of more than one) - would appear to point away from the assertion that Luke’s account of history is mistaken.

To resolve this, a number of solutions have been put forward: (1) The original manuscripts should read “when *Saturninus* was governor” and it was a later copyist - with Quirinius in mind from the famous census - that accidentally misreported the history.²⁷³ This, however, is not likely as there is no textual evidence to support the theory. (2) The historians who say that Quirinius was governor in AD 6-7 have got *their* facts wrong, and actually he was governor before at the time of Jesus’ birth. This is an argument from silence, and is also unlikely as Josephus and Tacitus are usually correct – the chart above is derived from their history. (3) Augustus ordered the census to be taken, but it did not actually take place until AD 6-7 / it was begun 5 BC but only completed AD 6-7. Again, both are improbable because there would have been no need for Joseph and Mary to have come to Bethlehem so early and Luke says that the census ἐγένετο – “came to pass / happened”, not “was accomplished” when

²⁷² Possibly some kind of official – note Luke calling him “most excellent” is the same expression Paul used when addressing Felix and Festus – governors of Judea.

²⁷³ The support given for this comes largely from Tertullian “There is historical proof that at this very time a census had been taken in Judea by Sentius Saturninus, which might have satisfied their inquiry respecting the family and descent of Christ.” (Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4.19) Tertullian’s history has been questioned as to (a) whether it is in reference to Lk 2 (Cf. Evans, ‘Tertullian’s References to Sentius Saturninus and the Lukan Census’, *JTS* 24 [1973] 24-39.) and (b) how accurate it actually is – elsewhere, Tertullian gives a different year for the birth of Jesus, i.e. in the forty first year of Augustus. Another intriguing fragment of Tertullian’s work in this area is his *and* Justin Martyr’s belief that the record of the census of Lk 2:1 (including the registration of Joseph and Mary) could be found in the (now lost) official archives of the reign of Augustus – to which they pointed their readers for assurance of the facts surrounding Jesus’ birth. (Justin, *Apol.* i.34; Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* iv.7,19) How useful it would be in solving this discrepancy to have those archives today!

Quirinius was governor of Judea. (4) Quirinius was, in fact, governor of Syria twice - certainly being governor at AD 6-7, he served another legateship before that to take the census of 5 BC. This is based on interpretations of inscriptions which have been taken to refer to Quirinius (though the same inscriptions have been attributed to other Roman men as well and interpreted in other ways), as well as the assumption that Quirinius, who had previously in his career (between 12 BC and AD 1) been appointed to carry out war on the Homenadenses, would have had to have been in Syria in a position of power to do this.²⁷⁴ However, again, we know who the governors of Syria were, so the earliest gap in which Quirinius could have been governor was 3-2 BC, which would be too late for the time of Jesus' birth. Another suggestion along the lines above (and based on the same inscriptions) is put forward by Ramsay who suggests that Quirinius was governor 8-6 BC *with* Saturninus. Both would rule together with different duties – Saturninus dealing with the politics and Quirinius commanding the legions and military resources of Syria.²⁷⁵ Stauffer alters this thesis slightly (Ramsay's thesis not quite working as it makes Quirinius governor too early) suggesting that around that general time, Quirinius was in charge of all campaigns and other affairs in the east.²⁷⁶ Stauffer proposes that Quirinius on occasion governed alone and at times was aided by an imperial provincial governor.

He writes:

It is evident that this division of power was in the nature of things, and Sulpicius Quirinius must be reckoned not only among the series of Syrian provincial governors, but also – and this chiefly – in the proud list of the Roman commander-in-chief of the Orient. In this capacity he governed the Roman-Orient like a vice-emperor from 12 BC to AD 16, with only a brief interruption (Gaius Caesar). In this

²⁷⁴ J.Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton: University Press, 1964) p.235. A helpful summary of Quirinius' career can be found in W.Brindle, 'The Census and Quirinius: Luke 2:2', *JETS*, 27.1 (March 1984) 45-46.

²⁷⁵ W.M.Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915) pp.292-300.

²⁷⁶ E.Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Knopf, 1960) p.29.

capacity he carried out the *prima description* in the East. Thus, he was in a position to begin the work of the census in the days of King Herod, to continue it without regard to the temporary occupancy or vacancy of the post of Syrian governor, and finally to bring it to a peaceful conclusion.²⁷⁷

Stauffer's solution works, however, it has very little hard evidence to support it – most of it is inference and speculation.

The most plausible solution to Lk 2:2 comes from a study of its grammatical construction. As has already been hinted at above, in the verse αὕτη ἀπογραφὴ πρώτη ἐγένετο ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς συρίας κυρηνίου (“This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria”) the word πρώτη - however it is translated – indicates that Luke knew of more than one census. In the NIV it has been treated as indicating the first of the two censuses. However, it could also mean “before”. The translation would then read “this census took place before the one when Quirinius was governor of Syria.” This translation is admittedly slightly awkward but the verse itself is (uncharacteristically of Luke) an unusual construction. Marshall comments, “Luke does write loose sentences on occasion, and this may well be an example of such.”²⁷⁸ Despite the slightly awkward construction, most grammarians are prepared to accept this grammatical use of πρώτη,²⁷⁹ so the solution works. In addition, it would, in fact, make sense in the context. Luke recognises that most readers would think back to *the* famous census of AD 6-7 (associated, as Gamaliel shows [Acts 5:37], with the uprising of Judas the Galilean and the revolt) when any reference to a census came up around that time. But Luke has deliberately inserted πρώτη in Lk 2:2 to distinguish between the two, thus wanting to say that the census

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p.30.

²⁷⁸ I.H.Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978) p.104.

²⁷⁹ Though Fitzmyer really does not (*Gospel according to St. Luke*, p.405).

during which Jesus was born was the one before the famous one which Quirinius carried out.

We now turn to the hardest category to resolve, class A. The class A category of discrepancies are notorious for their usage by those who want to discredit inerrancy on the grounds of phenomena.

Class A

Staff or no staff?

One such text is the sending out of the twelve disciples on their mission in the synoptic gospels as there appears a direct contradiction between Mark, and Matthew and Luke:

Mt 10:9-10: *[Jesus said] “Do not take along any gold or silver in your belts; take **no** bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals **or a staff**; for the worker is worth his keep.”*

Mk 6:8-9: *These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey **except a staff** – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic.”*

Lk 9:3: *He told them: “Take nothing for the journey – **no staff**, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic.”*

Matthew seems to disagree with Mark over whether Jesus permits his disciples to take a staff or not, and Luke also disagrees with Mark.²⁸⁰ This discrepancy has perplexed many for a long time, and many attempts to resolve it have proved inadequate, the most common being (a) that the types of staffs and sandals the evangelists are referring to are different, though there is no difference in the text to support this, (b) all three agree on the main point being to travel light, but this in no way begins to resolve the difficulty, and (c) Matthew has conflated two different accounts of the

²⁸⁰ It will probably also be noticed that there is some kind of difficulty over the sandals as well. Though this is not anything like as major as the issue of the staff, it will be mentioned in passing in the discussion.

commission – Mark and Q’s (cf. Luke’s account), however, this does not remove the discrepancy, it simply pushes the problem back a stage. Osborne has suggested taking option (c) a step further, observing that Matthew’s sending of the twelve (Mt 9:37-10:16) contains some closer parallels to Luke’s sending of the seventy (Lk 10:1-12) than it does Luke’s sending of the twelve (Lk 9:1-6). So, rather than Matthew conflating Mark and Q’s accounts of the sending of the twelve, Osborne thinks that Matthew has conflated Luke’s (or possibly another source’s) accounts of the twelve and the seventy into one story, the conflation being legitimate because the twelve would likely be part of the seventy.²⁸¹ Though this solution would appear to work (just), it still would leave Luke disagreeing with Mark. So, Osborne suggests that Luke has assimilated some of his sending of the seventy into the sending of the twelve.²⁸² However, this final step in his resolution bends inerrancy too much. Matthew’s conflation would be just about legitimate because of the presence of the twelve disciples within the seventy, but lifting Jesus’ words from the setting of the seventy and placing them in into the sending of the twelve (the other way) goes too far and puts on Jesus’ lips words he did not say to the twelve. And in any case, why would Luke do that? Changing minor historical details would not appear to add anything to his sending of the twelve.²⁸³

However the best solution again appears to be a grammatical one.

Mt 10:9-10: Μὴ κτήσησθε χρυσὸν μηδὲ ἀργυρίον μηδὲ χαλκὸν εἰς τὰς ζώνας ὑμῶν, μὴ πήραν εἰς ὁδὸν μηδὲ δύο χιτῶνας μηδὲ ὑποδήματα μηδὲ ῥάβδον· ἄξιός γάρ ὁ ἐργάτης τῆς τροφῆς αὐτοῦ.

²⁸¹ Blomberg notes that Luke’s use of ἐτέροις in 10:1 would on first glance seem to contradict this claim; but argues that on observing more closely ἐτέροις it “actually contrasts with the three who rejected 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.” (C.L.Blomberg, “The Legitimacy and Limits of Harmonization” in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, D.A.Carson and J.D.Woodbridge [eds.] [Leicester: IVP, 1986] p.155).

²⁸² G.R.Osborne, ‘The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism: Critique and Methodology’ *JETS* 22.4 (December 1979) 314.

²⁸³ Though it is worth mentioning that Blomberg (one of the best known discrepancy-busters) is convinced by this solution (Blomberg, “Legitimacy”, p.155).

Mk 6:8-9: καὶ παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἵνα μηδὲν **αἴρωσιν** εἰς ὁδὸν εἰ μὴ ράβδον μόνον, μὴ ἄρτον, μὴ πήραν, μὴ εἰς τὴν ζώνην χαλκόν, ἀλλὰ ὑποδεδεμένους σανδάλια, καὶ μὴ ἐνδύσησθε δύο χιτῶνας.

Lk 9:3: καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· μηδὲν **αἴρετε** εἰς τὴν ὁδόν, μήτε ράβδον μήτε ἄρτον μήτε ἀργύριον, μήτε δύο χιτῶνας ἔχειν.

As becomes obvious (see the bold font), Matthew's word for 'take' is different to Mark and Luke's, which might give a clue as to what the evangelists are intending. Most solutions looking at Greek words for 'take' make the mistake of assuming that Matthew's κτίζω means "procure/purchase", which then leads to problems because it is nonsense to "purchase money". But Miller, noticing that Matthew's usual word for 'financial purchase' is ἀγοράζω (Mt 14:15; 25:9-10; 27:6-7), proposes that a better translation of κτίζω in Matthew would be "to locate / obtain". Consequently, the prohibition in Matthew would be concerning the "*hunting for* and securing / obtaining a staff".²⁸⁴ Miller continues that in Mark's account, Mark's word for 'take' is αἶρω, a broad word which Mark usually uses to mean "pick up and carry" (i.e. physically, as in luggage/baggage) (Mk 2:9; 6:29; 11:23; 13:16), so Mark is specifically *allowing* them to "pick up and physically carry" their walking staff (presumably the one they would each probably have already).²⁸⁵ Miller continues that Luke (whether as Miller suggests he is relying on Matthew's account, or whether he is relying on Q) cannot use the verb κτίζω because he uses that verb elsewhere (Lk 18:12; Acts 1:18; 8:20; 22:28) to mean "*purchased / financially owned things*". For this reason, a broader word to mean something similar to Matthew's / Q's use of κτίζω – Luke opting for αἶρω – has to be used. By further word study, Miller identifies that just as κτίζω

²⁸⁴ Probably due to the urgency of the mission which is indicated in all of the accounts by the sparse items they are permitted to 'take'. Miller here also helpfully draws attention to what is probably the use of prophetic hyperbole employed by Jesus in him saying "take nothing" – the disciples would all have had a walking stick to hand. Glen Miller (created 25 / 7 / 1999) *Good question...well did Jesus tell them to take a staff or not? Another contradiction?!* Available: <http://www.christian-thinktank.com/nostaff.html> (accessed 9th March 2007).

²⁸⁵ Miller, Ibid.

does not mean the same for Luke and Matthew; so also the word ἀίρω does not (often) mean the same for Luke as it does for Mark (which dissolves the contradiction). This is suggested in Lk 10:4 where Luke uses the word βαστάζω, which (for him) means “to bear / carry” (the equivalent of Mark’s ἀίρω).

Alternatively, Mark uses ἀίρω twenty one times to indicate the physical action of ‘picking something up to move’. βαστάζω is used only once – in referring to a man *already in the process of carrying* a pitcher. Miller strengthens his case by way of using an example that directly contrasts Jesus’ instruction that his followers must daily take up their cross and follow him – where Mark uses ἀίρω (Mk 8:35) and Luke uses βαστάζω (Lk 14:27). So Miller: “What this strongly argues for is that Luke’s βαστάζω = Mark’s ἀίρω (at least sometimes²⁸⁶).”²⁸⁷ The final piece in Miller’s argument is to show that Luke’s ἀίρω can be used in the same sense as Matthew’s κτίζω. He cites a particularly relevant example in Lk 17:31 (specifically relevant because it is in another context of high urgency): “leave now with what you have!” to demonstrate the point.

Hence Miller lays out his conclusions as:

1. In Matthew, Jesus tells them to not ‘make preparations’ - the trip is too urgent to ‘acquire belongings for the trip’ (cf. Luke 17.31). No hesitation - start *now* with what you already have at your disposal!
2. In Mark, Jesus tells them to ‘pick up the walking stick that is sitting beside them, (though presumably to leave the bread, bag and money) start *carrying* it, and then to get moving!’...no hesitation - start walking *now*!
3. In Luke, Jesus tells them the same thing as in Matthew - do not ‘make preparations’, but Luke has to use a different word to Matthew. Although he uses the **same word form** as Mark does, **the meanings are different** - as can be seen from their independent uses of the same word-form.

²⁸⁶ This ‘sometimes’ is a reference to when Mark and Luke’s ἀίρω mean the same thing. However Miller is aware that this is when Luke (and it also occurs in Matthew) is relying solely on Mark as his source so uses Mark’s word (e.g. Mt 9:1-8; Mk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26 and Mt 12:13, 18-23; Mk 4:15-25; Lk 8:12-18 and Mt 14:20; Mk 6:43; Lk 9:17).

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

So Matthew's κτὰομαι equals Luke's αἶρω (in this and in other passages), and Mark's αἶρω equals Luke's βασιτάζω (in this and other passages).²⁸⁸

Further weight is given to Miller's solution in (a), in Matthew and Luke's grammatical imperative constructions,²⁸⁹ as opposed to the subjunctive Mark uses, and (b), particularly Mt 10:10, but also to an extent Lk 9:3, has a fairly strong textual variant saying "staves" rather than "staff",²⁹⁰. The disciples would not have been carrying a number of staves with them – they would have certainly have had to go and acquire them.

Conclusions from part 3

Part 3 of this thesis has been occupied endeavouring to work through phenomena of Scripture since this is the contentious issue that prevents many from being willing to speak of Scripture as being inerrant. Possibly to some readers, all of the resolutions given will have seemed plausible. To others, most would; to yet others, only about half would have seemed plausible – this is because we all have different levels of what we accept as plausible.²⁹¹ However, this immediately raises the further question: How is inerrancy affected by the discrepancies whose resolutions we do not accept as plausible?

It has already been noted that a hypothesis or doctrine can still stand firm even in the presence of what appear to be counter instances. In such a situation (like in the domain of science), the assumption is that these counter-instances are not *actual* counter-instances, but rather, only *appear* to be, and will eventually be resolved. The

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ See underlining in the sentences above.

²⁹⁰ Although Nestle-Aland appear to have preserved the strongest text for both Matthew and Luke, for Matthew a number have the variant ῥάβδους (e.g. C L W f ¹³ a ff^l k μ sy^h bo^{ms}) as do a few in Luke (e.g. A C^c K U Γ Δ Θ Λ).

²⁹¹ This is a complicated issue to do with rationality of belief. Such a study is beyond the scope of this dissertation, however, see the Appendix for a brief discussion of some of the issues.

problem, then, as it stands is that we are not in possession of all of the facts, and there is some unknown piece of information which would resolve the apparent counter-instance.²⁹²

This must now be applied to the exegesis done on the difficulties discussed in this, and the previous chapter. From this exegesis, it is clear that much work has had to be done in the areas of textual criticism as well as history, archaeology etc. from the biblical time of writing, to resolve some of the difficulties. However, approximately two thousand years after the accounts were written, we are simply not in possession of all of the data which the writers could assume the original readers would have had in order to determine how the difficulties resolve. This does not mean they are irresolvable, but just that so far, no such solution has emerged. This does not expose a problem with the Bible itself, but, rather with our limitations of knowledge.

One anticipates the critique that this is just another apologetic move to defend inerrancy relying on a time (“which will never happen”) when all the facts will be revealed to prove inerrancy. But, the inerrantist would be justified to reply firstly, that as more research is being done, more of the difficulties are being resolved²⁹³ (as is the case, for example, of the excavated Sheep Gate pool surrounded by five covered colonnades [of Jn 5] recently discovered, or further inscriptions [e.g. those mentioned with the Luke 2:2 test case]). Secondly, the procedure of allowing an ancient writer - who has shown himself to be generally reliable in his work - the benefit of the doubt even when he does appear to contradict with himself / some other writer of his time (on the grounds that we do not know all the details), is one which scholars of other disciplines in ancient history carry out in looking at other historiography. So, it is not

²⁹² How many such alleged counter-instances are granted before abandoning the doctrine or hypothesis is another very difficult question to answer. The Appendix also gives further thought to the question.

²⁹³ Often it is a case of someone having resolved the difficulty in, for example, the 12th century. It is just that their work has disappeared until recently or someone has discovered something new.

a case of special pleading when it comes to the Bible; and thirdly, those who say that there will never be a time when all the facts are available is to deny the Bible's eschatology that actually, one day, there will come a time when all these things will be revealed. Consequently, rather than having to produce satisfactory resolutions for every difficulty, it is the task of inerrantists (in the line of many throughout church history) to study hard now for plausible resolutions where possible, and to look forward to a time when all the difficulties will be relieved – that may well being at the eschaton.

Carl Henry brings a thoughtful summary, therefore, of what evangelical scholars should be aiming to do in their exegesis:

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.²⁹⁴

This does mean nevertheless, that at the end of part 3 we need to slightly alter our definition of inerrancy, as we conclude the second phase of induction, to the following:

*Inerrancy means that **when all facts are known**, the Scriptures, in their original autographs and when interpreted according to the intended sense, will be shown to be entirely true and trustworthy in everything that they affirm.*²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ C.F.H.Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco: Word, 1976-83) 4:364.

²⁹⁵ This definition is fairly close to Feinburg's definition – a very short summary of the ICBI's statement (see P.D.Feinburg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy" in *Inerrancy*, N.Geisler (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) p.294. However the definition I have given is somewhat tidier and less pedantic.

Preliminary Conclusion

The preceding 3 parts have sought to reach the heart of the inerrancy debate by researching one of the key questions within that debate, namely, ‘what exactly is inerrancy all about’ – ‘what does inerrancy mean?’ This question is of course foundational to the debate, but far too often is not given as much consideration as it needs; but if one can arrive at a carefully defined meaning of inerrancy following the appropriate method, I think a number of the issues in the inerrancy debate become mute and one finds himself a considerable distance down the path towards answering the vital question ‘is the Bible inerrant?’ This has been presented throughout the previous six chapters, which have identified a number of what the key issues were and are in the inerrancy debate, where it seems that (given a theistic worldview and an approach to theology which assumes the God of the Bible who speaks and is completely truthful [theistic presuppositions]), the two main issues which sway a scholar on the question of inerrancy are exactly these: firstly, their approach and methodology for thinking through the doctrine of inerrancy, and secondly, the way terminology is both used and understood in thinking the question through. The following is a short summary of the issues reviewed so far.

Methodology

As was said very early on, approaching the subject of inerrancy from the wrong angle leads to erroneous conclusions.

On outward appearance, one of the loudest reasons for not arriving, or rather, not allowing for the definition of inerrancy proposed, is very often the issue of the

phenomena and the claim that they point away from such a definition. However, underlying this is usually one or both of the following mistakes. The first one is that often only Lindsell-type, straw-men solutions have been engaged with, resulting in the assumption being made that all inerrantists are of a similar poor standard in biblical studies and that no plausible solutions can be put forward for difficulties within Scripture. However, through more scholarly engagement with some of the resolutions given in this thesis, or the writings of inerrantists such as R.T.France, H.Ridderbos etc. this would at least show that even if not all their resolutions are convincing, that some of these difficulties *can* be explained. Therefore, to define inerrancy as we have would be a lot more acceptable than is initially thought. But the second mistake underlying the phenomena issue is very often where such a scholar has begun in their methodology. Although there have been quite a few critiques given of Beegle's writing, it appears that many have, and still do, inadvertently follow him in their doctrine formulation by wanting to proceed with an enumerative induction – a method not appropriate for forming a doctrine. Such scholars would do well not only to read the critiques of Beegle, but also to re-read the very often misread Warfield, and learn from his approach to doctrine, to avoid making the error of disallowing inerrancy as defined here just because certain phenomena seem to jut out and not fit the framework of inerrancy. But by developing Warfield's approach, this thesis has argued for the strength of retroductive methodology for forming a doctrine because of the ever self-refining process that retroduction entails.

Terminology

Throughout the six chapters, we have seen that certain pieces of terminology surrounding the inerrancy debate are hazardously slippery and have ship-wrecked

many scholars' attempts to get to the heart of what inerrancy really is. We have already seen an example of the above in scholars' (mis)understanding of the word 'induction', confusing enumerative induction with true induction, but the following two words especially are of vital importance to the inerrancy debate, and so have sought to be defined and re-termed accordingly.

In Chapter 3 it was discovered that Warfield's meaning of what he calls the 'inspiration' of Scripture is notoriously difficult as what he meant by this *is not* that the Scripture itself is inspired, but rather that it is God-breathed or (as McGowan suggests) 'Spirated', and its actually the human authors who are inspired (but only as an immediate trigger for writing after the life-long superintendence process that led up to that moment of inspiration). A few times over the course of these chapters I have indicated that Warfield's using 'inspiration' as an umbrella term which covers both the process and the product was arguably misleading and I have suggested that for clarity it is better to describe them as two separate ideas: The product being 'God-breathed / Spirated Scripture' and the process being 'inspired human writers' having had their lives 'superintended' by God's providential oversight up to the point of writing.

Chapters 4-6 highlighted that even after navigating the difficult terrain over the term 'inspiration', the actual meaning of inerrancy itself is just as difficult, if not harder to understand, hence devoting the majority of a dissertation to it. I am not alone in having to apply such extensive writing to such a definition, it took the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy four pages to define inerrancy fully (though part of the strength of their definition *is* that length, meaning the council were able to define what is not meant as well as what is meant by the word inerrancy) and for this reason, it has been suggested that the word 'inerrancy' should be dropped. I

sympathise with this view. Although such lengthy definition is due to wanting to be honest and follow a sound methodology in constructing the doctrine, having defined the word inerrancy to mean that, ‘when all facts are known, the Scriptures, in their original autographs and when interpreted according to the intended sense, will be shown to be entirely true and trustworthy in everything that they affirm’, I suggested that the heart of this definition is about truth and trustworthiness, so it might be better to adopt either, or both, of these two terms when speaking about Scripture rather than use ‘inerrancy’. Of course, the terms ‘truthfulness’ / ‘trustworthiness’²⁹⁶ would have to be defined carefully too, but slightly less so than the word inerrancy requires, thus meaning this terminology may be less misleading.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Of these two terms, my personal preference would be ‘truthfulness’, as ‘true’ was the word used in the definition given of inerrancy.

²⁹⁷ Sexton argues that to revise terminology would be to “breed confusion” because of inerrancy’s long history as a term. (J.S.Sexton, ‘How far beyond Chicago? Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate’ *Themelios* 34.1 [April 2009] 46). But inerrancy’s long history of being misunderstood – right up to the current day – seems to be a good reason *for* potentially revising it to ‘truthfulness’.

A further advantage of changing the terminology would be to hopefully lose the stigma attached to the word ‘inerrancy’ following the heated discussions had between 1976 and 87. At that time, ‘inerrancy’ became a divisive, even polarising word, where, upon hearing it, certain thinkers vigorously wanted to, and still want to disassociate themselves from such a position as it is one they associate with fundamentalists (E.g. Barr *Escaping from Fundamentalism* [London: SCM, 1984] or Barton *People of the Book: The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* [London: SPCK, 1988]); whereas (at the other extreme) others saw and see inerrancy as the mark of whether a person is a real Christian or not – it is a badge used to establish who is ‘in’ and who is not. (See Balmer who identifies that for many evangelicals, inerrancy has come to be regarded as “one of the touchstones of orthodox theology” [“Inerrancy,” in *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* {Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002}, p.292]. A particularly obvious example of this is the way certain theology faculties in America limit the employment of faculty staff to those who advocate inerrancy [remark made in private conversation by Wayne Grudem, 2006], something that has been happening from at least the time of 1980 [see R.Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (eds.), *Inerrancy and Common Sense* {Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980}], but the ‘touchstone issue’ goes back even further [See Schaeffer’s *No Final Conflict: The Bible without Error in all that it affirms* {London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975}. Schaeffer’s being a philosopher, indicates why he was inclined to argue such a position – (as will be seen in the following chapter) he sees one of the big issues being a person’s epistemology – whether it is Scripture or reason, and anything less than full belief in the inerrancy of Scripture means that the epistemology switches from divine revelation to human reason. However, thinking about it from more of a theological position, though Schaeffer is right philosophically, there are many who do not hold to a consistent epistemology, yet want to submit to the authority of Scripture. The philosophical aspect of why inerrancy has become a ‘touchstone’ doctrine would be a question of much interest for further research. Henry has also suggested that “the real objection to inerrancy is philosophical...” {‘The Bible and the Conscience of Our Age,’ *JETS* 25.4 {December 1982} 403–4.} and it is worthy of note that many of those who would regard as inerrancy as being a foundational doctrine have been members not only of the Evangelical *Theological Society*, but also of the Evangelical *Philosophical Society* {e.g. Geisler, Nicole, Moreland, Craig}, so further study of this would be of much value and interest.)) Such responses, I personally think are unhelpful,

Whether or not the suggested terminology above is accepted,²⁹⁸ whichever terminology is ultimately used, must be understood by both writer and reader alike to enable real discussion and debate to continue.

So, having avoided the traps laid out above, inerrancy has thus been defined. This leaves the scholar now in the position to be able to proceed with continuing debate today and to set about answering the bigger question, ‘is the Bible inerrant?’ - ‘Is it rational to believe in such a doctrine?’

A full answer to the above question is beyond the scope of this M/Phil, but the following are a few thoughts for the person seeking to answer the question.

The Rationality of belief in Inerrancy

At the end of part 1, we established the retroductive methodology as being a strong one for pursuing a doctrine of inerrancy, but of course, the whole of that framework was built upon the assumption that one can trust the source of doctrine – the Bible – in the first place. Unless one believes 2 Timothy 3:16 or John 10:35 (for example) to be true in the first place, one could never come to the doctrine of inerrancy, let alone believe it to be rational. One has to assume a certain kind of inerrancy before reading

and to an extent, changing the terminology for the new century may (hopefully?) have the advantage of losing the stigma attached with the word ‘inerrancy’ that is felt. Such a change would be similar to the switching of the word ‘fundamentalist’ when referring to an evangelical to ‘conservative’ – a move which was successful in jettisoning some of the baggage attached to the former word.

²⁹⁸ Despite being in favour of using the word ‘truthfulness’, I am sceptical as to whether it will be accepted for the debate as a whole. As well as ‘the truthfulness debate’ sounding more awkward, Sexton is right in saying that ‘inerrancy’ has a long history and is therefore a term ingrained in the minds of people. (J.S.Sexton, ‘How far beyond Chicago?’, 46) Although, as I have said, this would still be a good reason to change it, the latest phase of the inerrancy debate has already begun still maintaining the term, so it seems quite unlikely that ‘truthfulness’ will triumph. That being said, the number of those considering the term is growing (e.g. Feinburg, [“The Meaning of Inerrancy”, in *Inerrancy*, N.Geisler {ed.} {Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980} p.293], Witherington, [Ben Witherington on Scripture, Available: <http://euangelizomai.blogspot.com/2007/09/ben-witherington-on-scripture.html> {accessed 16th May 2009}] and Olson, [‘Why Inerrancy doesn’t matter’ http://www.baptiststandard.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4670&Itemid=134 {accessed 7th May 2009}]) so we will simply have to wait and see what the scholarly consensus is on the subject in this new phase.

Scripture and so enabling theologising, otherwise one is left with a book which one does not believe. This is why I said above that unless a person has a theistic worldview, they could not accept the definition of inerrancy offered. So it should be made very clear, that for any belief in inerrancy (as with any doctrine) to be believed, it has to assume the foundational Christian truths that God exists, he is truth, the Bible is his word – the worldview of theism. Any argument for inerrancy subsequently flows from this. Without this starting point, one cannot accept the findings of inductive biblical exegesis to be true, so will not believe the Bible to be the word of God. Put another way (as the Augustine, Calvin and Plantinga model of epistemology maintains [in accordance with Scripture]), a person can / will only believe Christian doctrine if they are born-again, and hold to theism – a worldview which only comes through the Holy Spirit illuminating the heart to accept such basic truths as just outlined above.²⁹⁹

Developing this somewhat, for one to draw an *external* doctrine of inerrancy (i.e. from the inductive exegesis of Scripture), it can only be drawn starting from the basis of an *internal* deduction – namely something that has happened within a person's heart and mind. When a person is illumined by the Holy Spirit, they become assured of the foundational truths of the Christian faith (that God exists, he is truth, and the Bible is his word etc.). But before a person even approaches the work of external theology, the internal deduction, i.e. combination of two foundational truths, that the Bible is his word + God speaks truth, must have occurred for a person to believe what

²⁹⁹ Calvin is perhaps the best known theologian to advance such a position, speaking, as he (and Reformed theologians since him) did, about the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum* (the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit) (J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. H. Beveridge vol. 3 [London: James Clark, 1953] p.33). He argued that the foundational truths of theism – the truths found in the Bible - are objectively true (whether anyone accepts them or not), but since the fall of mankind, sin has distorted everything in the world, including mankind's hearts meaning that their hearts have now become darkened (Eph 4:17ff). Therefore, man cannot recognise or believe these doctrines unless the Holy Spirit enlightens the heart subjectively to receive them (1 Cor 2:14-16; Eph 3:18).

they are about to read in Scripture. We might call this internal deduction ‘illumination,’ because it shows that in some way, belief in the inerrancy / truthfulness of Scripture is something that happens in the work of illumination allowing a person to believe what Scripture says. To think of the doctrine of external inerrancy *this* way is helpful because it steers away from the stereotype that inerrancy is an awkward doctrine which is not very rational, and (as well as providing warrant for believing inerrancy even in the presence of phenomena which are difficult to resolve) makes the doctrine one that is much more natural and attractive.

The above thoughts may be interesting areas for further research for the person seeking to answer whether the Bible is inerrant, but unfortunately cannot be pursued here. The thoughts outlined just naturally flow out of defining inerrancy as we have, following the methodology laid out in this thesis. But returning to the aims of this particular thesis, having defined inerrancy in the way that we so far have, we think finally about whether such a model – though it is the best definition proposed in the debate up to now (bearing in mind the break from the debate from 1990 through to the current phase) – is adequate, or whether it can be improved for debate in the 21st century. Are there any modifications that can be brought to a doctrine of inerrancy to refine it, for debating the truthfulness of the Bible in the future?

Part 4

A 21st Century Inerrancy?

Chapter 7: The McGowan Proposal - Qualified Limited Inerrancy

The model of inerrancy arrived at in the preliminary conclusion was, and is, the strongest definition to date, that arose out of the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy's extensive writings between 1978 and 87. Defining it as such answers many questions that are being asked today concerning inerrancy, and places a theologian firmly in a position of being able to decide whether s/he thinks belief in such a doctrine is rational.

However, with the debate having re-ignited after a quiet period of almost twenty years, Andrew McGowan has recently proposed an alternative (and as said in the introduction, somewhat controversial) model for speaking of inerrancy for the 21st century – a model I am going to call the 'qualified limited inerrancy' model. This chapter will analyse McGowan's proposal to see if it is preferable to the older model of inerrancy.

I call McGowan's proposal 'Qualified limited inerrancy' because really it appears to be a more subtle version of the limited inerrancy that was advocated by the likes of Rogers and McKim or the Fuller Seminary back at the peak of the debate between 1978 and 1987. So, to understand McGowan's proposal, it is worth considering first of all the 'limited inerrancy' model advocated by evangelicals who wanted to affirm the truthfulness of Scripture in some sense, aware as they are of Jesus / Scripture's own teaching on the subject,³⁰⁰ yet were not willing to accept the definition arrived at as given at the end of parts 1-3 of this thesis; mainly due to the phenomena issue. As should be obvious, I do not agree with the limited inerrancy position so the critique of it follows in light of what has already been looked at in parts 1-3, but it is helpful to

³⁰⁰ See chapters 2-3.

understand that model to shed light on McGowan's proposal which he sees as a halfway house between limited inerrancy and inerrancy.

Limited inerrancy / 'infallibility'³⁰¹

Those who hold to limited inerrancy want to affirm that the Bible is inerrant / true in some respect. However, they would want to make the distinction that they think Scripture is *only* inerrant in important areas, i.e. matters of faith and practise, but not in things such as history, geography and science.³⁰² The reason for this belief is grounded in 2 Tim 3:15 – Scripture's function – which says that the primary reason Scripture has been given is to bring people to faith in Christ Jesus. Limited inerrantists, on the basis of 2 Tim 3:15, argue that it would not matter too much if there were minor mistakes in Scripture over issues such as history and science because that is not the primary intention of Scripture; rather, what *is* important (and what we find to be true) in Scripture are those things that would bring a person to faith in Jesus, and the teaching that enables them to live a godly life. Bloesch:

Scriptural inerrancy can be affirmed if it means the conformity of what is written to the dictates of the Spirit regarding the will and purpose of God. But it cannot be held if it is taken to mean the conformity of everything that is written in Scripture to the facts of world history and science.³⁰³

This position, although previously held in various forms,³⁰⁴ really became prominent at the end of the nineteen-seventies when the combination of a few factors made room for this position to take root. Particularly significant in the rise of limited

³⁰¹ As mentioned in chapter 4, using the term 'infallibility' to denote limited inerrancy is a newer redefining of the word. The newer definition comes from Rogers and McKim's work *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

³⁰² For a classic example of an evangelical taking this line, see S.T.Davis, *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977).

³⁰³ D.G.Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994) p.107.

³⁰⁴ James Orr held to a variation of the modern-day limited inerrancy at the turn of the 20th century.

inerrancy were, (a) Fuller Seminary's decision to revise their statement of faith on Scripture to that given above – this made limited inerrancy seem credible as endorsed by an academic institution, and (b) Rogers' and McKim's writing their *Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*³⁰⁵ - an historical analysis of the doctrine of Scripture, in which they claimed that Hodge's and particularly Warfield's (under the influence of post-reformation scholasticism [particularly the thinking of Turretin]) position was a deviation from the orthodox doctrine of Scripture advocated through church history³⁰⁶ – this provided limited inerrancy with an amount of credibility from an historical angle too.³⁰⁷ On a surface level, the limited inerrancy stance appears to share a lot in common with the inerrancy outlined in chapter 4, the only apparent difference being that limited inerrantists allow for mistakes in the science, geography and history categories. As a result, it is not too surprising that the position has become popular in some churches today.³⁰⁸ However, in the evangelical

³⁰⁵ (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

³⁰⁶ In their book, Rogers and McKim claim that the orthodox position held throughout church history only declared that the Bible is true and authoritative on matters of faith and practise, so they encourage conservative Christians of today to discontinue reading Warfield back into Calvin and the Church fathers and defer back to the position held through most of church history – true and authoritative in matters of faith and practise only.

³⁰⁷ Though maybe not as a direct influence on the Reformed Church, it is also worth mentioning that something similar happened in the Catholic Church. At Vatican II, the first draft of their updated position of Scripture said

Since divine inspiration extends to all things [in the Bible], it follows directly and necessarily that the entire Sacred Scripture is absolutely immune from error. By the ancient and constant faith of the Church we are taught that it is absolutely wrong to concede that a sacred writer has erred, since divine inspiration by its very nature excludes and rejects every error in every field, religious or profane. This necessarily follows because God, the supreme truth, can be the author of no error whatever.

However the fifth draft that was finally accepted said

Since everything which the inspired author or sacred writer asserted must be held to have been asserted by the Holy Spirit, it must equally be held that the books of Scripture teach firmly, and without error that truth which God willed to be put down in the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.

W.M.Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild, 1966) p.119 cited in D.A.Carson "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture" in *Hermeneutics Authority and Canon*, D.A.Carson and J.D.Woodbridge (eds.) (Leicester, IVP, 1986) pp.8-9.

³⁰⁸ The big similarity being that both positions agree that Scripture's primary intention is to bring people to faith in Christ and enable them to live a godly life. However, the big difference between inerrancy and limited inerrancy (as argued in my chapter 4) is that the verses relating to science, history, etc. that are not precise, or do not use modern scientific language that limited inerrantists argue

academy, it has not flourished. The Rogers and McKim proposal has been countered - most comprehensively by Woodbridge - as being historically inaccurate³⁰⁹, and the position of Fuller (not long followed by Dallas) seminary certainly has not prevailed among other evangelical institutions. The reason Fuller's view did not persuade other academic institutions is that there are a number of problems with the limited inerrancy thesis (quite apart from the inaccurate church history that Rogers and McKim had proposed).

Firstly, as we have already seen in chapters 3 and 4, *all* Scripture claims to be God-breathed and therefore true – not just the parts to do with faith and practise. In the past, supporters of limited inerrancy – particularly Orr - have argued that yes, all Scripture *is* inspired, but to differing degrees which allows for certain minor sections being less accurate than others; yet, as already seen, this falls into the 'God-breathed' / 'inspired' word fallacy trap examined in chapter 3, and once it is remembered that *all* Scripture is breathed out – i.e. has the same degree of authority as God's word, Orr's response cannot stand.

Secondly, limited inerrancy makes the mistake of saying that theology can be separated from history. Apart from what we shall see below, the two cannot be separated because God reveals himself *in* human history, so the two are inextricably bound together. Taking the books of Kings for example, at the start of 1 Kings, God reveals his covenant faithfulness in history by extending the boundaries of the land of Israel – part of his covenant blessings promised in Deuteronomy 28 for Israel's obedience to the covenant. Were the boundaries not extended historically, there is no

are errors, inerrantists argue are not errors. Rather, inerrantists emphasise the importance of giving room for the expressions of language, genre and precision appropriate for documents of the time when the Bible was written.

³⁰⁹ Woodbridge regularly exposes occasions where Rogers and McKim have misunderstood and misrepresented the history surrounding the topic of biblical authority and where they have quoted theologians out of context. (J.D.Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982])

way in which anyone can draw theology from this – if anything one is left with an unfaithful God (certainly not the theology of the Bible). A more blatant example, if Jesus did not rise historically from the dead, you are not left with just theology, you are left with nothing (1 Cor 15:14). The Bible never divides history from doctrine and ethics.

Thirdly, limited inerrancy is built on a non-Christian philosophy, the worldview of existentialism which separates fact from existential experience. Francis Schaeffer shows the short-falling of this approach:

If we try to separate the religious passages in the book of Genesis [though could be applied to any part of Scripture] from those which touch on history and the cosmos, the religious passages are relegated to an upper-storey situation. They have been removed from any connection to space-time verification, and that means no historical or scientific study can refute them. But it also follows that no studies can verify them. In short, there is no reason to accept the upper-storey religious things either. The upper-storey religious things only become a quarry out of which to have our own personal subjective, existential, religious experience. There is no reason then, to think of the religious things as being other than in one's head.³¹⁰

And again, even more forcefully:

[if we are to accept a position that suggests inerrancy is limited to matters of faith and practise] The result is that religious things simply become 'truth' inside one's head – just as the drug experience or the Eastern religious experience is 'truth' inside one's head.³¹¹

Another problem with adopting the existentialist worldview is that it is actually a variation on a heresy which Scripture condemns in 1 John, one which tries to divide the spiritual realm from the physical realm (asceticism) as if God had not made them

³¹⁰ F.Schaeffer, *No Final Conflict: The Bible without Error in all that it affirms* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975) p.17. On an everyday level, when discussing things of God with someone who does not share the Christian worldview, one would ultimately be saying, "The Bible is wrong on things that can be checked, but you have to believe it where it cannot be checked!"

³¹¹ Ibid., p.18.

both in the first place. To approach theology with anything other than a Christian theistic worldview is disastrous.

Fourthly, if we accept the limited inerrancy thesis, it begs the question, ‘If God could not speak truthfully (or alternatively, accommodated himself) when speaking on issues such as science and history, what would be to stop him accommodating himself and erring on matters of faith and practise?’ But, likewise, if God could write truthfully and say what he wanted about matters of faith and salvation, what would prevent him from being truthful on matters of history and science?

Fifthly, limited inerrancy leaves a problem with deciding what is important - a matter of faith and practise - and what is not, and that authority has to come down to the reader’s human reason. Obviously, where one draws the line is difficult, but the bigger problem here is *who is* drawing the line? If the reader has to decide which parts of Scripture are important and which are not, this leaves a big hole in the person’s epistemology. Although limited inerrantists want to claim that Scripture is their final authority, then having to decide which bits in Scripture are and are not totally true means they are inadvertently claiming that reason is their basis as well. But one can only have one basis of epistemology.³¹² So Pinnock (when he was an inerrantist) states: “Unfortunately, once biblical inerrancy is surrendered, it’s far from clear on what ground Christian truth can be predicated.”³¹³ And elsewhere he elaborates:

It is impossible to maintain the theological principle of sola Scripture on the basis of limited inerrancy, for an errant authority – being in need of correction by some outside source – cannot serve as the only

³¹² The limited inerrantist will want to retain the authority of Scripture despite this tension, but so doing (il)logically pushes them to the position (the same as that which Bovell found himself with) having to conclude that “the Scriptures’ absolute authority and its sporadic incompetence (at least through contemporary eyes) must be admitted simultaneously”. (*Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals* [Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007] p.61.) (See also Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008] pp.139, 227.)

³¹³ C.Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy” in *God’s Inerrant Word*, J.W.Montgomery (ed.) (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973) p.145

source and judge of Christian theology.³¹⁴

Knowing and identifying what our basis of epistemology is is vital for theology.

Ward affirms:

The refusal of epistemology in theology and church-life can therefore lead quickly to the idolatrous grounding of authority either in oneself or in one's religious community. This theological position is rightly both ridiculed and feared, both within and outside the church.³¹⁵

Sixthly, limited inerrancy unhelpfully divides Scripture's ontological authority from its functional authority. So, in line with this, Bloesch maintains that: "The Bible not only directs us to truth but also speaks truth. It not only points to truth but also communicates truth."³¹⁶ The very reason that Scripture has the authority and power to bring someone to faith in Jesus (2 Tim 3:15) is because it is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16) and God's word achieves what it sets out to do (Isa 55:8-11). To divide 2 Tim 3:15 from 16 leaves no ground for Scripture to be able to do what it says it will do.³¹⁷

So, for these reasons, the limited inerrancy position is not as strong as full inerrancy and therefore has never really been in a position to contend with it.

Qualified limited Inerrancy

McGowan's alternative stance to both inerrancy and limited inerrancy is that which I am calling 'Qualified limited inerrancy'. Though – like plain limited inerrancy – this view has been around in varying forms for a number of years, it has only really been brought to light properly by Andrew McGowan in his recent book, *The Divine*

³¹⁴ C.Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) p.74. Quoting Pinnock (as I am) in favour of inerrancy, it is somewhat surprising that he no longer applies his previous questions to his work on Scripture now.

³¹⁵ T.Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, biblical texts and the sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p.291.

³¹⁶ Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, p.33.

³¹⁷ Such a realisation leaves Brown's conceptualising of the authority of Scripture frail. As another who translates 2 Tim 3:16 wrongly to mean 'all inspired Scripture', he sees Scripture's authority primarily in its functional terms (see his introduction p.xiii to W.P.Brown [ed.], *Engaging Biblical Authority* [Louisville: John Knox Press, 2007]) missing the point that its functional authority comes from its ontological authority.

Spiration of Scripture. In that book, McGowan argues that although a substantial amount of the Rogers and McKim proposal does not stand up to historical scrutiny, there is still helpful material in their work, and suggests that the historical question is not as clear cut as many think it is following Woodbridge's critique (because there were certain aspects of the work Woodbridge did not address). Though wanting to reject the limited inerrancy position (for some of the reasons above), McGowan is not happy with the inerrantist position either (for reasons below) and wants to steer a middle ground between inerrancy and limited inerrancy, refusing Geisler's dichotomy that all scholars are either inerrantists or errantists. McGowan turns to the writings of the Dutch Reformed theologians Kuyper, Bavinck and Berkouwer (as well as drawing to an extent on the Scottish theologian James Orr) to make a case for - what he claims is - a more organic view of Scripture, allowing more for the humanity of Scripture to come out, and allowing for the possibility that there might be errors.³¹⁸ We will look at the position he lays out below but firstly we will examine why he rejects inerrancy.

After helpfully ruling out two inadequate views on inerrancy - what he calls 'Fundamentalist inerrantists' and 'Textus Receptus inerrantists', McGowan then argues against the position given in chapter 4 of this thesis - what he calls 'Chicago inerrantists'³¹⁹ - on a few different grounds. (1) He is unhappy with the number of qualifications inerrantists make to their doctrine to enable it to stand.³²⁰ (2) He re-surfaces the autographs issue.³²¹ (3) He argues that textual issues are problematic for

³¹⁸ Whether McGowan has read Kuyper and Bavinck accurately has been questioned by Gaffin. In a revision of his older articles 'Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy' [part 1], *WTJ* 44 (1982) 250-290 and 'Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy' [part 2], *WTJ* 45 (1983) 219-272, Gaffin suggests that there is a possibility that Kuyper and Bavinck may have actually been inerrantists (R.B.Gaffin, *God's Word in Servant-Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Scripture* [Jackson: Reformed Academic Press, 2008] pp.46 and 102). Again, this is more to do with the historical question of inerrancy, but if Gaffin is right, it would very much weaken McGowan's proposal.

³¹⁹ The position arrived at following the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) - when I speak of inerrantists in this chapter, it is this group I am referring to.

³²⁰ A.McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture* (Leicester: Apollos, 2007), pp.106-109.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.109-112.

the doctrine.³²² (4) He is concerned with coming to the conclusion of inerrancy based on ‘God-breathed Scripture + God cannot lie = Inerrancy’, because he argues that inerrancy, derived from the above, makes it a second order rationalistic implication based too heavily on Hodge’s ‘store-house of facts’ method of theology, and limits God to be unable to produce anything other than an inerrant autograph.³²³ And (5) McGowan argues that Warfield and inerrantists play down the human side of Scripture, and that God involving human authors would naturally end with there being mistakes in Scripture.³²⁴ So, instead of inerrancy, the position McGowan wants to set out is what he sees as the middle-ground, that “Scripture, having been divinely spirated [his term], is as God intended it to be...[and] God is perfectly able to use these Scriptures to accomplish his purposes.”³²⁵ To clarify what he means by this, he once more states:

There is a third option, namely that the Scriptures we have are precisely as God intended them to be, but we must take seriously the fact that God used human authors to communicate his Word and did not make them into ciphers in doing so.³²⁶

McGowan’s proposal is an interesting one, which, as well as encouraging theologians to reconsider their theological method, potentially highlights certain short-comings with the definition of inerrancy as given in chapter 4, as well as suggesting a new position which he has tried to arrive at on the authority of Scripture. To respond, it is worth splitting the following into two parts, firstly looking at his reasons for rejecting inerrancy, and then, secondly, engaging with his new position.

We have already come across McGowan’s first objection against inerrancy (that inerrancy has to be overly qualified to stand up) in chapter 4, and objection 3 (that the

³²² Ibid., pp.112-113.

³²³ Ibid., pp.113-118.

³²⁴ Ibid., pp. 118-119.

³²⁵ Ibid., p.124.

³²⁶ Ibid., p.125.

phenomena disallow it) was examined in chapters 5 and 6, so these will not be covered here.³²⁷ It might also appear that his second objection concerning the autographs was covered in chapter 4 as well – it was to some extent, however, McGowan poses a number of valid questions which need to be addressed further with reference to what the actual autographs are:

...what do we mean by *autographa*? Even if we affirm that Moses was the author of Deuteronomy, he clearly did not write the last chapter containing the account of his death! In that case at least, an editor or scribe added something. Could not other books have received similar treatment? If so, which is the autographic text? Could further changes have been made to Deuteronomy much later? If so, do these scribal additions or emendations affect the status of these books as Scripture? What is the relationship between the autographic text and the versions admitted to the canon? As these questions demonstrate, a simple appeal to *autographa*, as made by some scholars, does not solve all of the difficulties.³²⁸

If we were being harsh, we might say it seems a little paradoxical that having tried to critique inerrancy because it is over-qualified, more clarification is called for on this issue. However, the questions raised are both important, as well as interesting.

McGowan quotes Deuteronomy chapter 34 – the death of Moses – as *having* to be a later addition (Moses could not have written it even if he were the author of the rest of the Pentateuch). A number of other scholars³²⁹ have drawn attention to this and also pointed to the fact that there is further evidence that the Old Testament (on a small

³²⁷ McGowan does, however, helpfully critique a clarification that Feinburg – one of the key thinkers in the inerrancy debate – tried to allow, namely that if a biblical writer quoted a source that had an error in it, then the biblical writer was excused from that error because he was not trying to *affirm* that history, just quote it (Feinburg tries to pass this off under the same clarification that Scripture sometimes *records* someone saying something, yet never *affirms* it [“The Meaning of Inerrancy” in *Inerrancy*, N.Geisler {ed.} {Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980}]). I agree with McGowan that this is special pleading, however, this last clarification of Feinburg’s is actually an *unnecessary* clarification of inerrancy because Feinburg does not actually cite any examples of this happening in Scripture. Therefore it was unnecessary to include it in his list of clarifications. So though helpful to point this out, McGowan does not actually diminish any of the rest of Feinburg’s work on clarifying the meaning of inerrancy.

³²⁸ McGowan, *Divine Spiration*, p.109 (emphasis his).

³²⁹ E.g. R.D.Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1926) p.11; B.Waltke, “Historical Grammatical Problems,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, E.Radmacher and R.Preus (eds.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) p.78; D.Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) p.85.

scale) has been revised and updated since it was originally penned, in passages such as Gen 11:28, 31; 14:14; 15:2b; 36:31; Deut 2:10-12; 3:8-11; as well as the phrase ‘until this day’ [scattered throughout historical narrative]). Though these revisions are often adaptations of place names (which the reader might not be familiar with in the old language but recognise in new, e.g. ‘Laish’ being renamed ‘Dan’ [Gen 14:14 cf. Josh 19:47-48]) to help the reader understand where is referred to more clearly, those scholars who think these are later additions, still maintain that they did not come from the hand of the original writer and could be problematic for the autographs idea. Inerrantists tend to respond to this in one of two ways. Firstly, some will argue that the above examples actually are not later revisions, but were genuinely written by the original author.³³⁰ (This may even be the case for Deut 34 – Moses prophesying his death, however, the most common resolution is that Joshua completed the book of Deuteronomy before starting his own book). However, an alternative view is that inerrancy *can* allow for these minor ‘updatings’ of the Old Testament. This suggestion - proposed by Michael Grisanti³³¹ - argues that rather than simply equating the autographs with the one original human writer (a suggestion which he disputes as being too much a New Testament idea of inerrancy forced back onto the Old Testament [in which a number of books {even on the most conservative understanding} have obviously been written by more than just one writer, e.g. Psalms, books of Samuel and possibly books of Kings]), inerrantists should allow room, when it comes to the Old Testament, for authoritative textual updating *by prophets* right up to the close of the Old Testament Canon – the time that the Old Testament autographs were finally finished. Grisanti proposes that (as is the case with the individual books

³³⁰ N.Geisler and W.Nix would be examples of this first group (*A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded* [Chicago: Moody, 1986] pp.221-234).

³³¹ M.A.Grisanti, ‘Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant view of Scripture’ *JETS* 44.4 (December 2001) 577-598.

of psalms) the writings of the Old Testament, though sometimes unfinished by the original writer (e.g. the Pentateuch lacking chapter 34), were God-breathed and inerrant the whole time in their unfinished states. They were then concluded by one of God's authoritative spokespersons between the time of first writing and the close of the Old Testament canon when the line of prophets ceased - after which revisions were not authoritative because the autographs were, by then, complete.³³² Whichever of the above solutions the inerrantist opts for, McGowan's objection does not stand as a reason to reject inerrancy.

McGowan's fourth objection to inerrancy is to do with what McGowan labels, 'the rationalist implication.' Within his fourth objection, there are two issues. (a) In recent times, Hodge's understanding of Scripture has been exposed as not being fully adequate and that we should recognise the personal and relational aspect of Scripture, rather than seeing it just as a mass of propositional, informative revelation. Vanhoozer and Ward are particularly helpful in pointing us towards speech-act theory to give us a better understanding of what God is *doing* in the reader when s/he reads his

³³² So, on this understanding, textual criticism on the Old Testament would seek to get back to the closed canon c.400 BC as opposed to back to c.1500 BC. Grisanti's alternative view is quite bold and on a surface level appears difficult for the inerrantist to hold, but actually, such a view is nuanced, and, as opposed to the Geisler and Nix view (which seems to be drifting back towards the idea that inerrancy is related to the inspired author), Grisanti's view is very much about the final *product* of Scripture. The fact that Grisanti only allows for updating to be done by other prophets, keeps the final product God-breathed, and once the line of God's spokespersons ended, there could be no more updating. Taking Grisanti's view, some might question why, when it comes to the New Testament, do these autographs have to have come from the one writer as opposed to leaving room for the plural writers Grisanti does of the Old Testament? The answer must lie in the fact that *only* within the generation of the apostles (again God's spokespersons) could authoritative God-breathed Scripture be written, and once they had died out, updating (such as Mk 16:8-20[?!] or Jn 8:1-11[?!]), if they were not written by the original writer are not genuine Scripture. Thinking back to chapter 4 of this thesis, Grisanti's proposal may appear to encounter some problems when it is remembered that kings were to copy the law and to keep a copy for themselves – how would this allow for later redactional work? I would speculate that Grisanti would avoid this problem by either saying that (a) by the time of the institution of the monarchy, the updating of the Pentateuch was complete or, (b) to question what was meant by 'the law' - was it the whole of the Pentateuch as we have it now, or only certain parts of it? (i.e. many scholars thinking that the 'book of the law' Josiah discovered was probably the book of Deuteronomy). Or, possibly, (c) (a mixture of [a] and [b]) which says that Deuteronomy 34 would likely have been added very early – definitely by the time of the monarchy – so if 'the law' does refer to the whole of the Pentateuch (or even just Deuteronomy) there would be no problem, and the updating of the place names is not problematic because whether one uses the old or new place names, they are still true, so it would not be of great importance which edition the king had in his possession.

Scripture.³³³ McGowan, too, recognises that Ward and Vanhoozer’s approach is extremely promising and is the way in which one should proceed. Yet, he fails to acknowledge that both of them are inerrantists as well.³³⁴ The fact they are inerrantists shows that just because one does not follow the Hodge methodology, it does not mean that inerrancy is incompatible with the better method of theology. McGowan misses the fact that though conservative theologians of today want to affirm that Scripture is *more* than just propositional information, careful theologians argue that it is certainly not *less* than propositional. This is one of the big points made in Vanhoozer’s book, *The Drama of Doctrine*, in which he calls his position ‘post-propositional’, but not anti-propositional. So, to logically combine two Scriptures to draw a conclusion is not rationalistic, and in fact, if this approach *were* ruled out completely, it would make systematic theology very difficult, if not impossible. Indeed, in his conclusion, McGowan actually does what he is trying to argue against. When questioned on what basis one can believe the Bible, he is forced to say “We can believe what the Bible says because God gave us the Scriptures [they are God-breathed] and he does not deceive.”³³⁵ (McGowan saying God “*does not deceive*”, reveals what is essentially a final attempt not to come to the conclusion of inerrancy, by trying to change the terminology from Titus 1:1b – “*God cannot lie*”, to “*God does not deceive*”³³⁶).

Actual methodology for drawing a doctrine of inerrancy has already been discussed, so it is to be remembered that inerrancy is not a rationalistic implication, but is

³³³ K.Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) and T.Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, biblical texts and the sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) See further my chapter 8.

³³⁴ Vanhoozer’s commitment to inerrancy was questioned following his lack of use of the word in his book *The Drama of Doctrine*. However, Vanhoozer clarified such an omission as being simply because the word brought confusion rather than because he disagreed with such a position (*The Kevin Vanhoozer Interview*, Available: <http://exiledpreacher.blogspot.com/2007/09/kevin-vanhoozer-interview.html> [accessed 9th May 2009]).

³³⁵ McGowan, *Divine Spiration*, pp.210-211.

³³⁶ The term, ‘indeceivability’ has been suggested as an alternative to ‘inerrancy’ by a number of evangelical scholars, including Bloesch, Rogers and Berkouwer. However, the short comings of this term have been highlighted by Feinburg (see “The Meaning of Inerrancy”, pp. 288-291).

compatible with the method McGowan actually endorses. (b) There is also a problem with what McGowan argues about God's character. Though making a fairly helpful point that inerrancy is always derived from the negative - that God cannot lie (for inerrantists, it may well be worth thinking about rephrasing inerrancy in terms of 'God-breathed Scripture from a God who is truth = inerrancy' as I have implied in chapter 4), McGowan disagrees with the inerrantist position because it says that God could *only* have breathed-out an inerrant Scripture - an unwarranted assumption about God's character, which limits him to acting in the way we expect him to act.³³⁷ This immediately sounds suspicious because if we did not expect God to act in certain ways, theology would be almost impossible (Hebrews 13:8). But God being God means that he *is* limited to acting in certain ways – he cannot lie, cannot do evil, cannot be unjust – otherwise he would cease to be God; so to say that we cannot expect him to 'not lie', or (as I am suggesting would be better) we can expect him to speak truth on every subject is a wholly legitimate conclusion to reach.

To finish this critique of McGowan's view of inerrancy we turn to his fifth objection - that inerrancy undermines the human side of Scripture. Again, there are two issues within this. Although McGowan anticipates critique on this matter, and the encouragement to read Warfield more carefully because (as seen in chapter 3 of this dissertation) Warfield actually leaves a lot of room for the human side of Scripture,³³⁸ McGowan's only response is to give – an albeit - surprising quote from Warfield in support of his own reading of him.³³⁹ However, a better conclusion would be that

³³⁷ McGowan, *Divine Spiration*, pp.113-114, 118.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.211.

³³⁹ The Warfield and A.A.Hodge quote reads: "They [the Scriptures] are written in human languages, whose words, inflections, constructions and idioms bear everywhere indelible traces of human error. The record itself furnishes evidence that the writers were in large measure dependent for their knowledge upon sources and methods in themselves fallible, and that their personal knowledge and judgments were in many matters hesitating and defective, or even wrong." (A.A.Hodge and B.B.Warfield, *Inspiration*, ed. R.R.Nicole [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979] pp.27-28) cited in McGowan, *Divine Spiration*, p.211.

which I previously outlined in chapter 3, that Warfield, though he sometimes drifts from his organic view of Scripture, has actually laid out a very thorough position on Scripture that makes sense of the human side of Scripture, as well as the divine. The other issue is the underlying assumption already covered in chapter 4, that to be human has to mean to err.³⁴⁰ This is not true.

Having suggested that McGowan's criticisms of inerrancy – though in some ways illuminating – are not strong enough to reject such a position, this implies that he may not be on the strongest ground to put forward his alternative 'middle-ground'. Remembering his position from above,³⁴¹ indeed, there are two major problems with his position. Firstly, whereas both inerrantists *and* limited inerrantists claim their position only for the original manuscripts, McGowan seems to be claiming that the Bible we have *now* is exactly how God wants it to be. Though McGowan would probably argue on the grounds of God's providence that the Bible was, and is, exactly how God wanted it in every age, this leaves big problems with Scripture changing. He seemingly wants to rule out the need for textual criticism – a discipline that both inerrantists and limited inerrantists are strongly in favour of. If this is not quite how McGowan wishes to be understood, the alternative (that his position would have to mean) is that the earliest manuscripts we still have (i.e. the manuscripts from c.350 AD onwards for the New Testament, and the Masoretic text [c.1000] plus the dead sea scrolls for the Old Testament) are how God wants them to be, which would seem to imply that God really is not concerned if differences / changes came about between the time of the original writing of Scripture up to the date of the earliest extant copies. This would be incompatible with God's word being eternal and unchanging argued

³⁴⁰ This appears to be the only distinguishing feature of Scripture having a human aspect from Warfield's view that Scripture has a human side to it. See chapter 4 fn 206 for a critique.

³⁴¹ "There is a third option, namely that the Scriptures we have are precisely as God intended them to be, but we must take seriously the fact that God used human authors to communicate his Word and did not make them into ciphers in doing so." (*Divine Spiration*, p.125)

for in chapter 4 of this thesis. Whichever interpretation one takes, his position cannot be a ‘middle ground’ because inerrancy and limited inerrancy only claim their position for the original manuscripts.

The second reason his position does not work is because the only thing that is different here from what Warfield advocates, apart from the factor of the manuscripts, is the last clause, “making them [the human writers] into ciphers.” This is essentially McGowan seeking to leave room for human error. As said above, McGowan arrives at this stance by drawing upon the work of Orr and Bavinck – other thoroughly Reformed scholars who also wish to leave room for human error. Unfortunately, neither Orr nor Bavinck can be of much help to McGowan, because to hold their position and avoid attributing error to God, both Orr and Bavinck attempt the indirect-identity thesis ploy of distinguishing between revelation and Scripture; being reluctant to use the expression ‘verbal inspiration’. As already seen above, Orr also distinguishes between varying levels of inspiration – seeing inspiration as something to do with the *person* as opposed to the God-breathed text.³⁴² McGowan wants to distance himself from these two difficulties in Orr and Bavinck. However, to do so, means that he cannot avoid being left with a God-breathed Scripture, yet, with what he sees as human error contained within it. The tension McGowan feels becomes obvious in comments such as:

...where there occurs the dilemma of *apparent* contradiction in the revelation, the dogmatician must let the *truths* stand side by side rather than failing to do justice to one truth or the other³⁴³

As Bavinck says, ‘God’s thoughts cannot be opposed to one another and thus necessarily from [sic] an organic unity’,³⁴⁴

...we must note that Bavinck’s view is not that of Rogers and McKim

³⁴² I personally think that Bavinck’s work was pushed to its logical conclusions by Berkouwer, whose in turn was pushed to its logical conclusions by Rogers and McKim.

³⁴³ *Divine Spiration*, p.149 (emphasis mine).

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.149.

and their supporters, who, in affirming the humanity of Scripture, so stress the mistakes and inadequacies of the human author that one is sometimes left wondering about the nature and extent of God's involvement in the process.³⁴⁵

Yet, at the same time:

'the guidance of the Holy Spirit promised to the church does not exclude the possibility of human error.'³⁴⁶

These seem to indicate that though he wants to leave room for errors in Scripture, McGowan is embarrassed to say that there actually *are* errors (wanting to downplay them). This is because, on his Warfield-influenced understanding of God-breathed Scripture, he has to attribute those errors to God. So, unfortunately for McGowan, it becomes obvious that - as Geisler says - either one believes that there are no errors present in the Bible, or s/he believes that there are. One cannot say that there might be, but there are no errors. All of this, as well as the continuing statements -

God...has ensured that the Scriptures in their final canonical form are as he intended them to be and hence is able to use them to achieve his purpose.³⁴⁷

God is perfectly able to use these Scriptures to accomplish his purposes³⁴⁸

We must simply accept the Scriptures as they are and trust that what they teach is for our good (and above all for our salvation)³⁴⁹

The theologian must be confident that God has spoken and therefore Scripture is infallible...in the sense...they will infallibly achieve God's purpose in giving them.³⁵⁰

- which show that McGowan is falling on his own form-content sword (separating Scripture's functional authority from its ontological authority), implies that there is no

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p.148.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., p.158 – this is McGowan again citing Bavinck in an air of approval.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p.118.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p.124.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., p.125.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., p.149.

consistent third option or middle ground. One is either an inerrantist or an errantist, qualified limited inerrancy, is merely a form of limited inerrancy.

McGowan's book on the whole is excellent particularly in the fact it suggests alternative terms for our doctrine of Scripture such as 'spiration'. However, I suggest that when it comes to his position on inerrancy, seeing that Woodbridge did not counter every point of the Rogers and McKim historical proposal, McGowan has sought to establish a new position from the basis of that un-dealt-with historical material and built an argument from there. McGowan knows that church history cannot be the only reason for re-shaping doctrine (though it might make theologians re-consider their doctrine of Scripture) and that theological, scriptural reasons have to be the primary reason for revising doctrine, but those arguments he puts forward are not strong enough to carry his thesis. However, he *is* to be commended for re-highlighting the interesting church history question on which possibly there is more to be discussed(?).³⁵¹

Evaluation

In this chapter we have looked at two alternative evangelical positions to inerrancy, primarily focussing on McGowan's alternative proposal. On a superficial reading McGowan's view is attractive, but in reality, it does not stand up to scrutiny. My own personal opinion is that underlying the qualified limited inerrancy (which I have argued is just a version of limited inerrancy) position lies a desire to hold to the authority and truthfulness of the Bible, yet leave room for minor errors which its advocate has not been able to resolve. Such a desire appears, in fact, to underlie every

³⁵¹ Would an expert like Woodbridge have responses to the points he did not initially address from Rogers and McKim's book? If so, maybe these might be brought forward. However, if not, there will likely be further discussion had on the Church's view of Scripture throughout her history.

limited inerrancy position. I cannot help but think that Montgomery summarises this perfectly when he says

The principal contentions of the liberal evangelical [the evangelical who holds to limited inerrancy] thus offer a singularly unsatisfactory approach to the question of biblical reliability. Quite clearly the advocate of this position is trying – without success, though with honourable motives – to eat his revelational cake while retaining the indigestible scriptural errors claimed by secular critics.³⁵²

But, as we have already seen, the phenomena of Scripture do not disqualify inerrancy as so far defined in this dissertation. So, although McGowan's proposal may attract some interest on a less scholarly level, his alternative model is not one which helps or improves on the ICBI model, so, if we want the definition of inerrancy arrived at in the conclusion to be refined, we must look elsewhere.

³⁵² J.W.Montgomery, *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the trustworthiness of Scripture* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974) p.32.

Chapter 8: The Vanhoozer Model - Dramatic Doctrine

Since the early 1990s, scholars' views on doctrine - revelation and Scripture in particular - have undergone, and are still undergoing, a major change. Having benefited from (amongst other things) certain insights that postmodern thinking has brought with it - such as its stronger emphasis on the personal and volitional aspect of truth (as compared with modernity's emphasis on truth being primarily cognitive and possible to gain by applying the right methods to fields of study), scholars are now viewing the models of Scripture they have inherited from the period of modernity as no longer being entirely adequate for speaking wholly about Scripture. So, alternative models have been, and are being sought for, to describe Scripture more fully in terms of what it is.

At root, the growing consensus is that orthodox expositions of revelation far too often condense, or rather 'flatten' the concept of revelation, describing it and working with it as though it is just a 'storehouse of facts'.³⁵³ On this received view, the Bible is seen as being primarily (though at worst, only) a set of propositions written by God that inform the reader about who he is and what he has done – this constitutes revelation. Then, having received such information, the reader is to respond in faith.³⁵⁴ Vanhoozer describes this as propositionalist theology and concisely summarises it another way by stating that, "*Propositionalist theology views the Bible as revelation, revelation as teaching, teaching as propositional, and propositions as*

³⁵³ C.Hodge, *Systematic Theology* vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) p.10. Hodge expounds this 'storehouse of facts' at the start of his *Systematic Theology* (pp.1-2) where he writes, "In every science there are two factors: facts and ideas; or facts and the mind...The Bible is no more a system of theology, than nature is a system of chemistry or mechanics. We find in nature the facts which the chemist or the mechanical philosopher has to examine, and from them ascertain the laws by which they are determined. So the Bible contains the truths which the theologian has to collect, authenticate, arrange, and exhibit in their internal relation to each other. This constitutes the difference between biblical and systematic theology. The office of the former is to ascertain and state the facts of Scripture. The office of the latter is to take those facts, determine their relation to each other and to cognate truths, as well as to vindicate them and show their harmony and consistency."

³⁵⁴ This method of doing systematic theology is evident, for example, in Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, p.35-36.

statements of truth or falsity.”³⁵⁵ Such thinking exposes quite clearly a modernistic tendency of seeing truth as something merely cognitive, and the general agreement³⁵⁶ is that such an understanding is simply two dimensional and better models are needed.

This has interesting connotations for the inerrancy debate and the definition given in this dissertation, because to define inerrancy as meaning, ‘when all facts are known, the Scriptures, in their original autographs and when interpreted according to the intended sense, will be shown to be entirely true and trustworthy in everything that they affirm,’ seems to fall into this propositionalist mentality which is now becoming outdated. Although, as this chapter goes on, we shall see that inerrancy being a propositionalist doctrine is not necessarily a reason for abandoning it, to recognise changing and developed views on revelation and what Scripture is as a whole, may well bring with it insights as to how we might ‘upgrade’ inerrancy at the same time – it too taking on board the lessons we have learnt from postmodern thinking.

So, this chapter will look at the refinements that have been made to the orthodox view of revelation and Scripture by focussing particularly on the writing(s) of Kevin Vanhoozer.³⁵⁷ Lessons learned from this will then be applied to inerrancy. Vanhoozer in particular, has been chosen because (as was hinted at in the previous chapter) he is the most contemporary of Reformed theologians who both follows the Scripture Principle (which has been argued for in the earlier part of this dissertation) but has learnt from the writings of postmodernists and applied those insights to Reformed doctrine.³⁵⁸ His conceptualising of Scripture, therefore, has very useful implications

³⁵⁵ K.Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) p.267 (emphasis his).

³⁵⁶ Other examples (apart from those already mentioned in this and previous chapters) include J.Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and J.Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994).

³⁵⁷ Mainly from his important text, *The Drama of Doctrine*.

³⁵⁸ Other key writers who have contributed to the contemporary doctrine discussion (though not as recently) are Alistair McGrath (*The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990]), George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and*

for our doctrine of inerrancy, as we seek to develop it into a refined 21st century model.

Vanhoozer's thesis

In his book, *The Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer seeks to re-claim theology – and particularly doctrine - from those who see it as dry, purely academic theory and a substitute for actual Christian living. Doctrine, Vanhoozer argues, has gone wrong if it is boring and just debated over by people removed from real life, because when done properly, it should be something exciting, energising - direction for living out the Christian life. As the title of his book suggests (to illustrate the vitality of doctrine) he describes salvation history as being like a drama – a theo-drama – performed in front of everyone in the world, in which God is the playwright, all believers are the actors (with Jesus being the playwright-actor who makes an appearance in the drama), the Bible is the script, the Holy Spirit the director (with pastors under him), and the role of the theologian being the dramaturge. The dramaturge's role, Vanhoozer contends, is essential in that s/he helps the actors and audience (who are eventually collapsed into one³⁵⁹) to understand the script, (amongst other things) by choosing a solid edition (translation) of the play and by researching the play to make sure that it is performed according to the intended sense (authorial intention) - in summary, to supply the actors (believers) with “both *instruction for understanding* the drama and *direction for participating* in it.”³⁶⁰

Theology in a Postliberal Age [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984]), Paul Ricoeur (*Figuring the Sacred* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995]) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (*Truth and Method* [New York: Continuum, 2002]).

³⁵⁹ Vanhoozer recognises the difficulty of taking the analogy too far.

³⁶⁰ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, p.268.

To describe doctrine as ‘drama’ automatically entails that it should make a difference to the Christian / actor’s (and hence the theologian’s) life³⁶¹, in that just as the Bible / script is not simply something to be understood – it is to be acted upon, so should doctrines be – instruction for our understanding, but also direction for our responding to the script. So, Vanhoozer does not fully approve of the modernistic propositionalist approach to theology – what he calls “dedramatized truth, a matter of theory only”³⁶² - which is only about ‘understanding’, rather he says that truth should also be, “*dramatic*: something to be done. (Gal 5:7; 1 Jn 1:6)”.³⁶³ Throughout his work, Vanhoozer keeps the two truths of ‘understanding’ and ‘doing’ together, showing that one reads Scripture to be informed cognitively – yes, but reading Scripture and doing theology should also make a volitional difference to the reader’s life too.³⁶⁴ Keeping the two truths together means that he cannot be charged with losing the propositional aspect of Scripture – and, therefore, doctrine (so abandoning the informing nature of Scripture³⁶⁵), but at the same time, he does not allow things to stay merely at that level, but recognises that there is much more to Scripture than just propositions.

The canonical script performs two authoritative functions: first, it gives true testimony to the words and works of the triune God of the old and new covenants, enabling understanding of the drama of redemption; second, it gives direction for the church’s continuing participation in that same drama.³⁶⁶

And again, more succinctly

What is authoritative about the Bible is what God says and does in and with his words.³⁶⁷

³⁶¹ Though the obvious limitation of the analogy is that an actor is only pretending.

³⁶² Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, p.419.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.419.

³⁶⁴ Another helpful analogy he uses is that of a map “The map is not simply to inform but to be useful.” *Ibid.*, p.294.

³⁶⁵ As he criticises William Abraham for doing in his book *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998)

³⁶⁶ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, p.179.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.68.

A look into Vanhoozer's insights into language here will be helpful to expand his ideas.

Propositions and Speech-acts

Vanhoozer has clearly been strongly influenced by the writings of language experts J.Searle,³⁶⁸ and particularly J.L.Austin,³⁶⁹ and their research on speech-acts. He has thus helped the world of theology to benefit from their insights. By way of brief summary, speech-acts theory reveals that to *speak* is to *do* something. When speaking, the speaker's activity is called *locution*; he speaks an *illocution* – what one *does* in saying (promise, command, instruct, warn, assert), the illocution has content (i.e. reference and predication) and a particular intent (a force) which shows how the illocution is to be taken by its recipient;³⁷⁰ and the recipient's response is called the *perlocution* - this is how the illocution is actually taken by the recipient and what effect it has on their actions or beliefs. So, an example of the above would be: a parent (locution) shouts a warning (illocution) to their child who is getting too close to the railway. The parent's intent is for the child to move away from the danger, which he in fact does so (perlocution) - the speech-act therefore fulfilling its intention.

So, a proposition is one version of a speech-act, but as seen above, there are many more. However, every illocution has some kind of propositional content (the reference and predication). Vanhoozer ties the two together:

Propositions will typically have a subject ('house') and predicate ('is green'). 'Is the house green?' has propositional content but it doesn't make a truth claim. A proposition, then, is something a speaker or author 'proposes' for our consideration. *A proposition is a thought pattern whereby a speaker or author weaves two or*

³⁶⁸ E.g. J.Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) ch 2.

³⁶⁹ J.L.Austin, *How to do things with words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975)

³⁷⁰ See John Searle's essay above, *Speech Acts*, ch. 2.

*more concepts together for some communicative purpose. Every Speech-act, even the joke, has propositional content; but not all Speech-acts make informative statements.*³⁷¹

Applying this to theology, when reading Scripture, one is not simply reading a series of propositions, but rather a whole gamut of speech-acts, God intending to do things through each one. Clearly, some of those speech-acts are propositions, e.g. “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” and every speech-act has some propositional content, but to restrict everything in Scripture to propositions is too limiting. All the way through Vanhoozer’s book he refers to the reader ‘tasting’, ‘experiencing’ and ‘feeling’ as s/he reads through Scripture. Thus for doctrine, although combining flat propositions to form doctrine is acceptable (because although Scripture is more than, it is certainly not less than propositions) it results in a two dimensional, or monologue conception of theology, and doctrine becomes reduced to just theory. Rather, Vanhoozer would have it, “Specifically, doctrine directs disciples to speak, act, feel, and imagine in ways that are fitting to those in Christ.”³⁷²

Summary and Evaluation

Vanhoozer wants to move beyond the narrow equation of the Bible as God’s word with the concept of merely propositional revelation, so prefers to conceptualise Scripture as *Divine Communicative action*, because in his own words:

1. It overcomes the personal / propositional dichotomy inasmuch as communicative action is both a ‘saying’ and a ‘doing’;
2. It corresponds to the biblical depiction of God as a communicative agent who does many things with words besides transmitting knowledge;

³⁷¹ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, p.90.

³⁷² Ibid., p.362.

3. It better accounts for the diversity of Scripture itself, that is, the plurality of literary forms;
4. It enriches the notion of canonical authority by insisting that the church attend not only to propositional content (i.e. revealed truths) but to all the things God is doing communicatively in Scripture to administer his covenant;
5. It encourages us to view the Bible as a means by which we relate personally to and *commune* with God.³⁷³

Vanhoozer's work has much to be commended in it. Although his extended use of the theo-drama can at times be cumbersome³⁷⁴, and his separating of the pastor's role from that of the theologian seems an unnecessary polarisation of the roles³⁷⁵, his view that theology is primarily studied for the benefit of the Church makes his work very practical. Such a contribution is also emphasised by his notion that theology should be viewed as a 'live' subject (one that is exciting and of direct relevance to the every day Christian). However, the greatest strengths of his work lie in his drawing upon the insights of speech-act theory to help one understand what is 'happening' when they are reading Scripture³⁷⁶, as well as his refusal to separate Scripture's cognitive function from its volitional function; meaning that he has learnt from the helpful

³⁷³ Ibid., pp.277-278.

³⁷⁴ Vanhoozer having to collapse God and the world into the one 'audience' has already been mentioned, and whether it is completely accurate to say that pastors are 'under-directors' of the primary director – the Holy Spirit – is questionable.

³⁷⁵ There is no reason why a pastor should not be a good theologian and vice versa. (This is actually the case for many of the faculty staff with whom Vanhoozer works at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School [e.g. Don Carson, John Feinburg, John Woodbridge etc.])

³⁷⁶ This is something he has been potentially criticised for – possibly over-relying on a philosophy of language that may itself become out-dated. However, Vanhoozer himself has pointed out that such a critique forgets that everyone relies on a certain philosophy of language, so there is no safe vantage point from which to make this critique (the philosophy which one criticises from may also turn out to be one to be rejected at a later date) (see *The Kevin Vanhoozer Interview*, Available: <http://exiledpreacher.blogspot.com/2007/09/kevin-vanhoozer-interview.html> [Accessed 9th May 2009]). It should also be noted that such an understanding of language is also endorsed by other excellent philosophers such as Wolterstorff (*Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995]), so Vanhoozer appears to be in good company.

insights that postmodern thought offers, but has not swallowed its ideas of relativism whilst doing so. To conceptualise Scripture and, thus, our doctrine of Scripture with the Vanhoozer model offered above has, therefore, very useful ramifications for how we might think of inerrancy in the 21st century.

Re-thinking inerrancy

In light of Vanhoozer's fresh approach to doctrine³⁷⁷, the definition of inerrancy I provided two chapters ago clearly falls into the older propositionalist model of doctrine – '**when all facts are known**, the Scriptures, in their original autographs and when interpreted according to the intended sense, will be shown to be entirely true and trustworthy **in everything that they affirm.**' However, although we now know that this propositionalist model and, therefore, doctrine of inerrancy is not the most encompassing way of describing Scripture, it is not a reason to reject such a doctrine. As it stands, it is two dimensional, nonetheless some of the speech-acts in Scripture *are* propositions, so it is not wrong to describe the Bible as inerrant, it is just somewhat restricted to certain parts of it (namely those speech-acts that are propositions).³⁷⁸ But by applying Vanhoozer's concept of the divine communicative discourse to Scripture, we now see that Scripture is *more than* (because it is made up of more than just propositions), *but not less than* inerrant. This careful balance of seeing Scripture as more than propositions, but not less than, is very important when thinking about inerrancy because it shows us how inerrancy can be developed for future discussion. But it also shows that (propositionalist) inerrancy cannot be disregarded. To address the latter point first, although, following Vanhoozer's work,

³⁷⁷ It is particularly refreshing to hear a 'professional theologian' rejecting the concept of 'ivory tower' theologians and instead challenging them to serve as a 'dramaturge' for church pastors.

³⁷⁸ Pinnock recognised this before the 1990s when he was asking what it meant for a parable or apocalyptic writing to be 'inerrant' – would, for example, everything that Jesus described in the parable of the sower actually have to have happened to be able to speak of it as inerrant?

we can see that truth is a lot more than just cognitive – it is dramatic too (therefore, so should be our doctrine), truth cannot be dramatic unless it is actually cognitively true – i.e. if (as I said in the previous chapter) the things in the Bible did not actually happen, and what we find recorded is not actually true on a cognitive level, then there is no way in which we would be able to say that it was true on a dramatic level. Truth can only be dramatic if it is indeed true,³⁷⁹ so to speak of the Bible as inerrant is still a very important aspect of our doctrine of Scripture. The Bible is certainly not less than inerrant. However, because of the multitude of speech-acts contained within, it is *more than* just inerrant. If we were to refine the definition given then of inerrancy to recognise its dramatic nature of truth as well, we might say that inerrancy means that, ‘when all facts are known, the Scriptures, in their original autographs and when interpreted according to the intended sense, will be shown to be entirely true and trustworthy in everything that they affirm **and do.**’

Such a definition has far reaching implications because of its incorporating of all speech-acts as opposed to just propositions, as well as meaning inerrancy has grown from being purely to do with Scripture’s nature to also being to do with its function.³⁸⁰ Because the implications are so far reaching, a full exposition of the definition (in a work this size) is unviable, but such an understanding is now three dimensional as opposed to two dimensional; rather than giving a propositionalist view of inerrancy, one might describe the refined definition as being a ‘dramatic definition’. In the refined definition, Scripture’s truth is no longer just an abstract and cognitive concept, but is something which acts and does - comparable even to how wisdom is *personified* in Proverbs 8. But, at the same time, the cognitive side of truth in the definition has not been maligned because its ontological nature is an essential part of truth ‘doing’

³⁷⁹ Remembering Schaeffer’s critique of existentialism in chapter 7.

³⁸⁰ Cf. Isaiah 55:8-11.

so the new definition still incorporates the 20th century inerrancy ensuring that the ontological aspect is not abandoned.³⁸¹ Therefore, this definition is a genuine *development* as opposed to being a totally new redefinition of inerrancy.

To view Scripture as such would be to take the inherited doctrine of inerrancy from modernism, developing it by applying certain lessons learned from postmodern thinking, but not making the mistake of leaving behind the important aspect of cognitive truth (one of the positive notions of modernity). For these reasons, I suggest it would be a helpful model of Scripture for future discussion and debate about the truthfulness of the Bible in the 21st century.

³⁸¹ This newer definition is also advantageous in the fact that, in relation to Scripture's truthfully 'doing', it allows room for that truth to be accomplishing its purposes even if that is not recognisable from the human perspective. On the last day, when all the facts are known, it will be seen that Scripture has truthfully done everything it set out to do.

Conclusion

Inerrancy has been debated for a long time at the scholarly level, with much energy and thought invested into the study. Although the history is long, it is, in a sense, just representative of the much longer ‘debate’ that has been going on at the popular level. Ever since the first writings of the Bible appeared, one of the vital questions that have been of application to every person who has walked this earth is, ‘is the Bible true?’ Because of the eternal implications involved, such a question is relevant for every person past, present and future, meaning that the place of the academic debate is hugely significant because the findings and conclusions of scholarly debate sooner or later filter down to ‘the man on the street’ and will affect the conclusions he draws. Those involved in the academic debate should not take lightly then the study with which they are involved and would do well to heed the importance of such study when thinking through the issues concerned.³⁸²

Despite its long history, the inerrancy debate shows no sign of fading out. One might be forgiven for thinking maybe it had following the decline of interest after 1987, but since mid-2000, literature has appeared, and is appearing, at a rapid rate suggesting that there is much more to come as a new phase of the debate is being added to its already lengthy history.³⁸³

As with all academia, each generation involved in the debate is in the privileged position of not having to start afresh when looking at the subject, but rather has the benefit of building upon the findings of previous generations. To ignore previous writings is somewhat foolish and naïve, and will mean that the same questions will be re-asked where time could be better spent trying to advance the study. Although there

³⁸² One is reminded of Deut 34:47: “[the Bible’s words] are not just idle words for you – they are your life.”

³⁸³ See again the Survey in the introduction, and particularly footnote 29.

have been occasions where Warfield's work has not been taken into account carefully enough³⁸⁴, the inerrancy debate has generally followed the principle of building upon the findings of previous works, and the doctrine of inerrancy has been defined and refined as it has gone on. But, following the phase of quiet from 1988-2004, the somewhat understandable danger that certain findings from its history have been, and are being, forgotten, seems to be being realised. This is happening as new contributions are emerging which attempt to add to the debate, but which are making the same mistakes as generations past. Such is the case (again) with the doctrine of 'inspiration', but particularly with inerrancy, hence the writing of this dissertation - an attempt to re-assert the foundation block of a strong definition of inerrancy upon which scholars might build for future discussion of the subject.

This dissertation proposes that inerrancy means that 'when all facts are known, the Scriptures, in their original autographs and when interpreted according to the intended sense, will be shown to be entirely true and trustworthy in everything that they affirm.' If all would-be contributors recognised and understood this definition – the strongest (concise)³⁸⁵ definition put forward so far by inerrantists – then in the contemporary phase of debate, energy could be put into debating, (a) whether this doctrine of inerrancy really is rational (as opposed to attacking the straw man as has happened in the past) and, (b) whether this strongest definition offered (so far) adequately encapsulates Scripture, or whether inerrancy can be reframed and potentially refined for the future. The preliminary conclusion and part 4 of this dissertation, although offering a few thoughts on the former of these two, has focussed on the latter. It has been argued that this strongest definition so far – what I call the 20th century inerrancy – is in some ways adequate, but, if we were to draw

³⁸⁴ As seen, for example, in the cases of Beegle, Barr, and Abraham (see chapters 1 and 3).

³⁸⁵ A fuller definition would be the Chicago Statement of Inerrancy, but its four pages are not always practical to cite when discussing the subject.

upon the insights offered by the scholarship done in the ‘quiet period’ of 88-05, we might jettison the modernistic / propositionalist colour of the definition and develop it into a 21st century doctrine. This has been done by applying insights from Vanhoozer’s work – a work immersed in the language of speech-acts as well volitional understandings of truth – to the older definition, adjusting it slightly, but at the same time comprehensively, to read, ‘when all facts are known, the Scriptures, in their original autographs and when interpreted according to the intended sense, will be shown to be entirely true and trustworthy in everything that they affirm and do.’ Such a refining of inerrancy brings a level of freshness to the debate by allowing room for – indeed celebrating - the diversity of Scripture’s speech-acts (as opposed to just propositions), as well as recognising truth’s personal / volitional character, so tying inerrancy to Scripture’s function as well as its nature. For these reasons, I suggest that such a refining of the old definition would make it more suitable for usage in the contemporary phase of the inerrancy debate.

It may conceivably be helpful to distinguish this 21st century refined version from the 20th century propositionalist inerrancy by giving it another name. However, being only a refinement as opposed to a re-definition, it can happily be incorporated under the traditional term ‘inerrancy’ (or ‘truthfulness’ as argued in the preliminary conclusion) just as Warfield’s and the CSBI’s refinements to the doctrine were when their amendments and clarifications were brought to the subject. And as already said, terminology is not as important as actually understanding what the terminology means. So, as the inerrancy debate continues on in its new phase of the 21st century, this refined inerrancy I would suggest fits both the criteria of advancing the strongest definition of inerrancy to date, as well as showing that inerrancy can be reframed and refined to further the discussion in the future. If the debate continues to do both of

these, the contemporary phase will bear much fruit for those wrestling with the issue, and be of much help to those thinking through the vital question, 'is the Bible true'?

Appendix

Resolution Plausibility and Falsifying of a Doctrine

Two closely related questions concerning the rationality of belief in inerrancy were raised at the end of chapter 6, namely, ‘would people not have different plausibility thresh-holds for accepting suggested resolutions to discrepancies found in Scripture?’ And, ‘how many “as yet unresolved” discrepancies would it take to falsify the doctrine of inerrancy?’ The two issues are to an extent separate, but there is considerable overlap, hence the addressing of both issues in the same appendix.

Resolution Plausibility

For a long time now, inerrantists have been producing books and articles which seek to address discrepancies, with attempts having been made to try and resolve individual phenomena. Within the literature, there are a number of good resolutions proposed (as hopefully seen in the chapters of this thesis), but there are usually a few weaker ones as well that are ‘passed off’ with the rest (as I have suggested for example, the ‘Zechariah’ resolution). This leaves the very valid question: who is to stipulate which resolutions are genuinely good and which are not; which are satisfactory resolutions, and which are weak? Put another way, when I read certain resolutions, my threshold for their plausibility might be higher or lower than another person’s, and I can give a personal opinion about it, but that is subjective opinion which may differ from another person’s.

Such an observation is true, and the question very valid, but the issue that needs to be highlighted here is that there *is* no *objective* criteria which can be employed to help a reader approach resolutions in an objective way.

In the study of epistemology there are concepts which express different degrees of rationality (e.g. ‘Having some presumption in its favour’, ‘Acceptability’, ‘Beyond

reasonable doubt’ [the last one being the concept sought for in a court of law to convict someone]) – which could have been applied to the seven test-cases. We might, for example, have judged the resolutions given in previous chapters with a scale that looks something like this:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 Having some presumption in its favour
- 5
- 6 Acceptability
- 7
- 8 Beyond reasonable doubt
- 9
- 10 Certainty

But this would not have aided in attempts to establish a resolution’s plausibility, for where these epistemic concepts are put on the chart and what number a resolution could be given, is still subjective. So, it needs to be admitted that, whether a person accepts resolutions put forward or not, it will always be arbitrary. This will be discussed at more length under the next question, but it does raise the issue that although objective criteria is important, for some systems, it is difficult if not impossible to give an objective standard / criteria by which to measure whether the data one is studying (resolutions in our case) is *reasonable*³⁸⁶ or not.

³⁸⁶ The law-court in fact has this problem. All twelve members of the given jury are told to make their personal verdict when considering the evidence, and are only able to prosecute if they feel the evidence for that is beyond reasonable doubt. But, what does ‘reasonable’ mean here? For certain members of that jury, they will find the evidence very reasonable to convict, for others, less so, - the result being that they will vote differently as to whether or not the defendant is innocent or guilty. It is for this very reason that there are twelve members on the jury as opposed to one, precisely because of this level of subjectivity.

Falsifying inerrancy

The discussion above leads into the second question of when inerrancy should be surrendered in light of ‘falsifying’ phenomena (i.e. those phenomena that cannot be resolved to a satisfactory standard). As we will see, answers from question two will be applicable to some of the issues raised in question one.

Moreland has helpfully identified that the deeper assumption underlying the question of falsification is that:

in order to know (or have a reasonable belief) that p, I must have criteria for knowing that p or perhaps that $\sim p$ (not p). In this absence of such criteria, one is no longer rational in knowing or believing that p.³⁸⁷

But, Moreland has gone on to demonstrate that this assumption is not as simple as it sounds for three key reasons.³⁸⁸

(1) As Chrisholm has highlighted, there are many things one can be justified in knowing without having to provide criteria for knowing them. If this were not the case, one would never know anything, since to know, one would have to have criteria for knowledge, but to know that criteria, one would have to have criteria for his criteria, and then criteria for that criteria – the whole investigation being a never-ending regress.³⁸⁹ So, in some circumstances, a person can be justified in holding to a certain theory even if exact criteria cannot be given for it (circumstances such as in the case of question one³⁹⁰, that some of the resolutions in chapter 5 and 6 were plausible, and for question two when inerrancy should be surrendered in light of falsifying evidence). (2) A second problem with falsifying a system with criteria is

³⁸⁷ J.P. Moreland, ‘The Rationality of Belief in Inerrancy’ *TJ* 7.1 (Spring 1986) p.77.

³⁸⁸ The following three reasons have been adapted from *Ibid.*, pp.81-86.

³⁸⁹ R. Chrisholm, *The Problem of Criterion* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1973)

³⁹⁰ It is likely that having been in a university for the last few years, there is some implicit criteria of rationality in my mind, even if I cannot explain that explicitly. This will be to do with previous experience of seeing issues resolved in light of data available. Moreland states: “In ranking plausibility...one implicitly or explicitly appeals to one’s background knowledge about the way things go in cases...” (Moreland, ‘Rationality’, p.80.)

that it proves difficult knowing where to draw the line, particularly when other disciplines are once more considered. As was hinted at in part 1 of the dissertation, when it comes to other disciplines, particularly the philosophy of science:

studies...show that it is very difficult to characterize when it is no longer rational to believe a scientific theory in the presence of anomalies. Studies in the history of science confirm this conviction.³⁹¹ It is, then, very difficult to give a simple treatment to falsification, ad *hoc* hypotheses, crucial experiment, theoretical simplicity, and the like.³⁹²

Moreland continues:

There are no acceptable criteria in the philosophy of science that can be applied in a simple, algorithmic way to all or most cases of theory change in science. The simple fact is that the rationality of theory change is a very multifaceted affair. The same can be said of theological systems. No simple set of criteria can be given for when one theological construct should be given up and another believed. This is not to say that there are no cases where theological or scientific hypotheses should be abandoned. But determining *when* that point is reached and *how* it has been reached is another matter. Theological constructs (first order or second order), inerrancy included, are no different from scientific theories in this regard.³⁹³

(3) As Plantinga has brought to light, (admittedly, this is more on a subjective level, but, it is still a valid problem with the falsification argument) each person has a noetic structure – a web of beliefs.³⁹⁴ Moreland explains that a person's noetic structure is a "set of propositions he believes, along with certain epistemic relations that hold between him and these propositions, and among the propositions themselves."³⁹⁵ Plantinga describes that, on the periphery of this web, there are beliefs that we hold to be true, but if it were discovered that they were false, it would not be overly

³⁹¹ Moreland footnotes T.Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); Neal Gillespie, *Charles Darwin and the Problem of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Stanley L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

³⁹² J.P.Moreland, 'Rationality' 83 For example, how (if one wanted to) would one go about falsifying that the world is spherical?

³⁹³ Ibid.,85-86 (emphasis his).

³⁹⁴ A.Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God" in *Faith in Rationality*, A.Plantinga and N.Wolterstorff (eds.) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) pp.16-93.

³⁹⁵ Moreland, 'Rationality', 78.

problematic to discard that belief because very few (if any) other beliefs would be affected (e.g. ‘I believe that there’s a tennis ball on my roof’). Conversely, towards the centre of the web are those more ingrained beliefs, which, if we discovered were not true would have a much larger effect on our web of beliefs, thus causing others to have to be discarded as well³⁹⁶ (e.g. ‘I believe there is a God to whom one day we will all be called to give an account’). The more deeply ingrained in a person’s noetic structure a belief is, the greater number of defeaters it takes for them to surrender that belief. With inerrancy being a deeply ingrained belief (it not being possible to let go of without a number of other beliefs being effected), it would take a lot more falsifying evidence than would, for example, the belief that there is a tennis ball on my roof, before it would be rational to divest of it. The three difficulties above then show that the ‘falsification’ test is not as straightforward a test as many like to think.

It needs to be made clear that in putting forward the above three arguments, what is not being argued is that criteria is unimportant or that falsification is not a valid test for whether a theory (in this instance inerrancy) is true or not. Both clearly are important and valid tests, and evangelicals should be keen to assess inerrancy with tests like these as far as is possible. However in light of the arguments above, it has been seen that in some instances, there is no such thing as objective criteria by which to rank plausibility; and with falsification, things are not always black or white - there are shades of grey in between where, in these places, it is difficult to say when certain systems (theological, scientific, philosophical, etc.) would have to be surrendered in the face of counter evidence.³⁹⁷ So this is to say, that even though one cannot give

³⁹⁶ Plantinga, “Reason and Belief”, p.50.

³⁹⁷ Moreland gives two ancient illustrations. (1) The puzzle from the ancient Greeks, known as the sorites problem. Given a small heap of wheat, can I get a large heap by adding one grain? It seems not, for how could one go from a small to a large heap by merely adding one grain. But then it seems that

exact criteria for when inerrancy would be falsified, or criteria for weighing discrepancy resolutions, lack of being able to do so is not a reason to abandon the doctrine.

Two further points need to be addressed about the falsification argument when it is applied to the issue of inerrancy. Firstly, the early Pinnock argued:

Many evangelicals are quite prepared to admit the possibility that evidence might turn up which would seriously undermine their confidence in the inerrancy of Scripture. It is the only approach consistent with an attitude open to the evidence. There is nothing shocking about such an admission. If it could be shown that Christ was not raised or that God did not exist, our religion and theology would certainly be in ruins. But *admitting a possibility is quite a different thing from expressing an expectation or making a prediction.*³⁹⁸

This reveals an assumption that often underlies the falsification argument when employed against inerrantists, namely that they are being pushed further and further back into a corner, with more and more unresolved discrepancies being discovered, so inerrantists are essentially engaging in special pleading to allow their case to stand. The assumption, however, is wrong as development is actually occurring the other way round. Throughout church history, theologians have been aware of where discrepancies lie,³⁹⁹ but as time has gone on, and more and more work has been done, more resolutions have been and are being found to these discrepancies (see conclusion to part 3 in chapter 6). So, in this respect, it would have to be said that those who hold

one could add grains of wheat to a small heap and never reach a large heap. Or (2) If one gradually changes the shade of a colour from red to orange, can one tell when the colour changes from red to orange? Probably not. But in the absence of such a criterion, how can I know when I see red or orange?

³⁹⁸ C.Pinnock, "Limited Inerrancy", in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the trustworthiness of Scripture*, J.W.Montgomery (ed.) (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974) p.155 (emphasis mine).

³⁹⁹ Boice highlights that "most of the alleged errors in the Bible are not recent discoveries, due to historical criticism and other scholarly enterprises, but are only difficulties known centuries ago to most serious Bible students. Origen, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and many others were aware of these problems." (He then goes onto say, "Yet they did not feel compelled to jettison the orthodox conception of the Scriptures because of them. Either they were blatantly inconsistent, which is a difficult charge to make of men of their scholarly stature, or else they had grounds for believing the Bible to be inerrant - grounds that were greater than the difficulties occasioned by the few problem passages or apparent errors.") *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) p.134.

to inerrancy now are in a stronger epistemic position than they were a hundred years ago, and those who hold the position in a hundred years time will likely be in a stronger position still, since yet more difficulties will be resolved in the future.⁴⁰⁰ So, although the inerrantist must remain open to its possibility, the expectation that inerrancy will be falsified is minimal. Pinnock's statement serves as a decisive conclusion with which to bring this appendix to a close:

We would have to say immediately that inerrancy has not yet been falsified, and we do not expect that it ever will. Whatever we may theoretically allow, our knowledge of Jesus Christ and his Word is sufficiently sure as to make this possibility a practical impossibility. We can go even further and state that the issues being what they are, we would require evidence of a most compelling variety [to falsify inerrancy]. Nothing less than clear demonstration would be sufficient to demolish a presumption about inerrancy, firmly established as it is on the clear testimony of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰⁰ So, the objection that the meaning of inerrancy set out in this paper as being too eschatological, i.e. it will only be useful at the eschaton when all is revealed, is misguided. Rather, the meaning is correct, and the closer we get to the eschaton, and the more evidence there is available, the more we will see the validity of inerrancy.

⁴⁰¹ C.Pinnock, "Limited Inerrancy", p.155.

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