

A Seismic Shift in the Inerrancy Debate

Norman L. Geisler
&
Douglas E. Potter

A seismic shift is occurring in the inerrancy debate. Unfortunately, few are alarmed about it. In fact, the masses are unaware of it. The shift is from the historically held, evangelical view to a neo-evangelical¹ view of limited inerrancy. The issue is whether inerrancy covers all matters on which the Bible speaks or whether it is limited to only redemptive matters. In succinct form, is the Bible inerrant only what it *teaches*, or is it also inerrant on whatever subject it *touches*? How do we determine which view is correct? In what follows, we first contrast the two views of limited and unlimited inerrancy. Second, we then see that limited inerrancy, the view that attempts to admit errancy to so-called unimportant areas of Scripture, is still active in today's scholarship. Lastly, we respond to some central objections or questions used by limited inerrantists.

Contrasting the Two Views

The Historic View of Unlimited Inerrancy

Many of the great teachers of the Christian Church spoke of the Scriptures as the Word of God and “without error” on whatever it affirmed.

The Early Church

Clement of Rome (A.D. 30–100) says, “Be contentious and zealous, brothers, but about things that relate to salvation. You have searched the Scriptures, which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit; you know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them.”²

Justin Martyr (A.D. 100–165) wrote: “When you hear the utterances of the prophets spoken as it were personally, you must not suppose that they are spoken by the inspired men themselves but by the divine Word who moves them.”³ For “We must not suppose that the language proceeds from the men who are inspired, but from the divine Word which moves them.”⁴ “To him [Moses] did God communicate that divine prophetic gift . . . and then after him

to the rest of the prophets...who use nothing from their own human conception, but from the gift vouchsafed to them by God alone.”⁵ For “the energy of the Divine Spirit . . . descending from heaven and using righteous men as instruments like a harp or lyre, [does this so He] might reveal to us a knowledge of things divine and heavenly.”⁶ In short, “the Holy Spirit of prophecy taught us this, telling us by Moses that God spoke thus.”⁷

Irenaeus (2nd cent.) declared: “the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God [Christ] and His Spirit.”⁸ He added, “The Scriptures [are the] ground and pillar of our faith.”⁹ And “the writings of those apostles, . . . being the disciples of truth, are above all falsehood.”¹⁰ “The Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit.”¹¹

Tertullian (A.D. 160–225). He declares that “this just and good God . . . Himself gave the law, and the prophets, and the Gospels, being also the God of the apostles and of the Old and New Testaments.”¹² So, we believe “the holy Scriptures to be no human compositions, but to be written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”¹³

The Medieval Age

St. Augustine (A.D. 354–430) says, “This Mediator [Christ], first through the Prophets, then by His own lips, afterwards through the Apostles, revealed whatever He considered necessary. He also inspired the Scripture, which is regarded as canonical and of supreme authority and to which we give credence concerning all those truths we ought to know and yet, of ourselves, are unable to learn.”¹⁴ “At the same time, as I have said already, it is to the canonical Scriptures alone that I am bound to yield such implicit subjection as to follow their teaching, without admitting the slightest suspicion that in them any mistake or any statement intended to mislead could find a place.”¹⁵ “In consequence of the distinctive peculiarity of the sacred writings, we are bound to receive as true whatever the canon shows to have been said by even one prophet, or apostle, or evangelist. Otherwise, not a single page will be left for the guidance of human fallibility.”¹⁶

The result is an inerrant Scripture for “let us understand that there is the most perfect agreement in them, let us not follow the conceits of certain vain ones, who in their error think that the two Testaments in the Old and New Books are contrary to each other; that so we should think that there is any contradiction here.”¹⁷ “No part of the Bible contradicts any other part. For

the utterances of Scripture, harmonious as if from the mouth of one man . . .”¹⁸ Indeed, “the Bible has no more difficulties than nature. Whoever has once received these Scriptures as inspired by the Creator of the world, must expect to find in them all the difficulties which meet those who investigate the system of the universe.”¹⁹

Augustine said, “For it seems to me that most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books.”²⁰ “For I confess to your Charity that I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error.”²¹

“And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it.”²² “For if you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement as made in the way of duty, there will not be left a single sentence of those books which, if appearing to any one difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away, as a statement in which, intentionally, and under a sense of duty, the author declared what was not true.”²³

The Bible is inerrant no less in historical and scientific matters as it is in redemptive matters. Down through the Middle Ages, from Augustine to Aquinas, there is significant support for unlimited inerrancy. The Bible was considered inerrant on whatever topic it addressed, whether redemptive, historical, or scientific.

St. Thomas Aquinas. As a member of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) was required not only to study Scripture but to expound it between one and four times a week. Thomistic scholar Angelus Walz notes that “Thomas, during his professorship, lectured principally on the Scriptures, since the Bible was the foundation of all theological teaching.”²⁴ This extensive study of the biblical text bore permanent fruit in his commentaries, which include *Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, *The Commentary on Psalms*, *The Commentary on the Book of Job*, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, *The Commentary on Saint John*, *The Commentary on the Epistles of Saint Paul*, and his famous *Catena Aurea (Golden Chain)* in which “he glossed the four gospels by means of a continuous exposition taken from the sayings of the saints.”²⁵ Twenty-two Latin fathers and fifty-seven Greek fathers appear. Even critical scholars of Erasmus’s caliber had nothing but praise for it.

Aquinas insists that “the author of holy Scripture is God.”²⁶ Thus “revelation is the basis of sacred Scripture or doctrine.”²⁷ For “holy Scripture looks at things in that they are divinely revealed.”²⁸ So it is “in Holy Scripture, through which the divine will is declared to us.”²⁹ Citing 2 Timothy 3:16 (“All Scripture is inspired of God”), Aquinas refers to the Bible as “Divinely inspired Scripture.”³⁰ Humankind needs an infallible “divine revelation”; otherwise the truth about God would be apparent to only a few, and only then after a long time and mixed with many mistakes.³¹

Like the Fathers before him, Aquinas sometimes speaks of the human authors of Scripture as the “instruments of divine operation.”³² For “in prophetic revelation the prophet's mind is moved by the Holy Spirit as a defective instrument by its principal cause.” Aquinas cites 2 Samuel 23:2 in support of his view: David says, “The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me.”³³ When God moves a human writer, an imperfect instrument can utter a perfect message, even to the very “words.”³⁴ This is possible because the perfect Principal or Primary Cause (God) works on the imperfect secondary cause. In popular language, God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick.

Unlike some of his predecessors, however, Aquinas does not view the human authors as mere instruments of God’s causality. Rather, they are secondary causes under the direct providential action of God, the Primary Cause. . . . God disposes people and events so that they will communicate his Word precisely.”³⁵ “In this way the human characteristics of the prophets in no way depreciate the message they convey.” Rather, the message “proceeds in harmony with such dispositions.”³⁶

Aquinas illustrates the divine–human relation in prophecy by the model of teacher–learner: “Prophecy is a type of knowledge impressed on the prophet’s intellect from a divine revelation. This happens after the manner of education. Now the truth of knowledge is the same in both the student and the teacher since the student's knowledge is a likeness of the teacher's knowledge.”³⁷

Rejecting the mechanical illustrations used by many of his predecessors (such as, God playing on a musical instrument), Aquinas provides new insight into the process of inspiration. Just as a teacher activates the potential of students for knowledge, so God (the Primary Cause)

activates the potential of people (secondary *causes* to know what God desires to reveal. Thus, prophets are not puppets or even secretaries but human learners. And, as a good teacher, God activates in prophets only what they have the potentiality to receive in terms of their capacities, culture, language and literary forms.

The divine origin of Scripture in no way diminishes its true humanity. Every word was written by human beings in human language reflecting their human culture. All the human traits of Scripture remain intact, including the use of various literary styles. For “Scripture conveys divine things to man in a style that men are wont to use.”³⁸ For “whatever images [figures of speech; Latin: *dicendum*] are used to express the prophesied reality is a matter of indifference to prophecy.”³⁹

In the final analysis, the words of Scripture are both wholly divine and wholly human. They are, to coin a term for Aquinas, theanthropic (God–man) words in Scripture. It is a co–authored book.

Thomas believed that the Bible is not only true in all that it *teaches* but also in all that it *touches*. For things “incidentally or secondarily related to the object of faith are all the contents of Scripture handed down by God.”⁴⁰ As examples of things in the Bible not essential to faith, but nevertheless without error, Aquinas cites such things as the fact that Abraham had two sons and that a dead man rose when Elijah's bones touched him.”⁴¹

In a real sense, Aquinas agreed with the later Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*, that the Bible alone is the Word of God the totally sufficient norm for our faith and life. He declared: “We believe the prophets and apostles because the Lord has been their witness by performing miracles. . . . And we believe the successors of the apostles and the prophets *only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their writings*”⁴²

After insisting that the biblical writers “so firmly asserted the truth that they left nothing to be doubted” and that anyone who rejects it should be “anathema,” Aquinas adds that “The reason for this is that *only the canonical Scriptures are normative for faith*. Whereas others who write about the truth do so in such a way that they do not want to be believed unless what they affirm is true.”⁴³ Agreeing with Augustine, Aquinas affirms that “*only to those books or writings*

which are called canonical have I learnt to pay such honour that I firmly believe that none of their authors have erred in composing them.”⁴⁴

The Reformation

The Reformers inherited their view of Scripture from the Church Fathers, a view of total or unlimited inerrancy. This is understandable since the Reformers were preoccupied primarily with soteriology and ecclesiology, not bibliology.

Martin Luther (A.D. 1483–1546) held that the Bible was the written Word of God. He wrote, “This exactly as it is with God. His word is so much like himself, that the godhead is wholly in it.”⁴⁵ Speaking of the Book of Genesis, Luther declared, “It must be, observed, however, that another one is the author of this book, namely, the Holy Ghost.”⁴⁶ He adds elsewhere, “He is called a prophet who has received his understanding directly from God without further intervention, *into whose mouth the Holy Ghost has given the words* [emphasis in original]. For He (the Spirit) is the source, and they have no other authority than God.”⁴⁷ “So, we refer all of Scripture to the Holy Ghost.”⁴⁸ “We must know what we believe, namely what God’s Word says... You must rely on the Word of God alone.”⁴⁹ So, “The Scriptures, although they too are written by men, are neither of men nor from men but from God.”⁵⁰

Luther adds, “I have learned to ascribe this honor (namely infallibility) only to the books which are termed canonical, so that I confidently believe that not one of their authors erred.”⁵¹ Thus, “When one blasphemously gives a lie to God in a single word, or says it is a minor matter if God is blasphemed or called a liar, one blasphemes the entire God and makes light of all blasphemy.”⁵²

John Calvin (A.D. 1509–1564) also followed the historic orthodox view of Augustine and Aquinas on unlimited inerrancy, claiming the Bible was the inspired and inerrant Word of God on whatever topic it addressed. Indeed, he went so far as to say that “We owe to Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it. . . . The Law and the prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of me, but by dictated by the Holy Spirit.”⁵³

Calvin insisted that “Our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author. Hence, the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose word it is.”⁵⁴ Hence, “...the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognized, unless they are believed to have come from heaven,

as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them . . .”⁵⁵ For the Bible is “...the composition of prophets, but dictated by the Holy Spirit”⁵⁶ For the writers of Scripture “. . . were sure and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit; and therefore, their writings are to be regarded as the oracles of God . . .”⁵⁷ Hence “our wisdom ought to consist in embracing with gentle docility, and without any exceptions, all that is delivered in the sacred Scripture.”⁵⁸ In view of the above citations, and particularly the use of the word “dictated,” one can understand how some could mistakenly believe that Calvin held to the verbal dictation view of Scripture. But one thing is certain, namely: he held firmly that every word of Scripture is God’s inspired and inerrant Word on whatever topic it addresses. And it is as verbally and fully inspired, *as if it were verbally dictated*, but it was not. Calvin, like Augustine, did believe that only the original text is inerrant for admittedly some errors have “crept” into copies.⁵⁹

The Post-Reformation Era

The Post-Reformation view on Scripture from Francis Turretin (*Institute of Elenctic Theology*), to B. B. Warfield and Charles Hodge (*Inspiration*, 1881) stood firmly in the orthodox tradition. This has been documented in a Harvard dissertation by H. D. McDonald (*Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study, 1700–1960*).

Warfield and Hodge summarize this period well: The Bible is the Word of God. “The New testament writers continually assert of the Scriptures of the Old testament...that they ARE THE WORD OF GOD. What their writers aid God said.”⁶⁰ The Bible is infallible. “. . . the line of inspired or not inspired, or infallible or fallible) can never rationally be drawn between the thoughts and words of Scripture.”⁶¹ “Every element of Scripture, whether doctrine or history, of which God has guaranteed the infallibility, must be infallible in its verbal expression.”⁶² The Bible was conveyed through humans. “Holy Scripture was the result of the co-operation, in various ways, of the agency of men and the agency of God.”⁶³ “Each sacred writer was by God specially formed, endowed, educated, [and] providentially conditioned . . . so that he, and he alone, could, and freely would, produce his allotted part.”⁶⁴ The Bible is verbally inspired. “Verbal inspiration . . . does not hold that what sacred writers do not affirm is infallibly true, but only what they do affirm is infallibly true.”⁶⁵ The Bible is inerrant: “And throughout the whole of his work the Holy Spirit was present . . . securing the errorless expression in language of the thought designed by God.”⁶⁶ “We do not assert that the common text, but only that the original autographic text, was inspired.”⁶⁷

The Contemporary View of Limited Inerrancy

The contemporary view of limited inerrancy is in stark contrast to the historic view of unlimited inerrancy, many modern scholars, particularly after Darwin (c. 1859), deviated from this historic orthodox view and adopted various forms of limited inspiration where in the authority of Scripture was limited to redemptive matters, excluding science and history. This was manifested before the turn of the century (in late 1800s) in the works of Charles A. Briggs and Henry P. Smith. These views were rejected by B. B. Warfield in *Limited Inspiration* (1894).

J. Marcellus Kik in the “Introduction” to the reprinted (1974) edition of Warfield’s *Limited Inspiration* speaks to the impact of the issue in Warfield’s day and warns of the consequences of not embracing the full inspiration of the Bible in future generations. Kirk says,

Many of those who oppose the Scripture’s claim to infallibility try desperately to retain some measure of authority from the written Word. They hold to some form of “Limited Inspiration” for the books of the Bible. In the later part of the 19th century several contended that the Holy Spirit’s inspiration was limited to all matters of faith and morals but did not extend to the recording of scientific and historical facts. Stress was placed on the infallibility of the written record of that revelation. This position is the precursor of the position of neo-liberalism and neo-orthodoxy that rejects the identification of God’s truth with any formulation given in the Scripture while at the same time strongly contending for the possibility of an existential, infallible experience of God’s revelation. . . .

With keen insight he [Warfield] shows the logical outcome of a theory of limited inspiration. The church cannot yield the surrounding territory to the ravages of the enemy with the hope that they will spare the citadel. . . .

We note with sadness that the lesson of history has not been learned by some within the conservative camp who feel that a theory of limited inspiration will safeguard the authority of and retain the respect for the Scriptures. The history of this theory shows that it destroys not only the authority of Scriptures as a rule for faith and life but the very authority of Christ himself. . . .⁶⁸

Warfield, in *Limited Inspiration*, explains through the writings of Henry Smith some of its problematic features. We cite just a few examples,

[quoting Dr. Smith] “The sole questions at issue is whether every statement on matters of fact, *outside the sphere* of doctrine and precept, is without error.” [Warfield explains] He [Dr. Smith] affirms it “to be impossible” to represent the Old Testament to be without error. He allows freely that this theory of the limitation of inspiration “to those matters which concern faith and morals” has no right to the name of “plenary inspiration;” which belongs rather to the doctrine that “entire truthfulness or accuracy is preserved in every assertion made by the authors of Scripture.” But he strenuously contends that this is all that Scripture or confession binds us to, and that it is all that the facts of Scripture will allow us to assert. The conclusion to which he desires to come, therefore, is that the Scriptures are an infallible rule of faith and practice; and that they are infallible in nothing else.”⁶⁹

Dr. Smith asserts that there is no Biblical evidence for the inspiration of Scriptures. There is Biblical evidence for the inspiration of the prophets, but none for the inspiration of the Scriptures. If we are to believe, then, that the Scriptures are inspired, it must be on extra-Biblical grounds; and, of course, what we believe concerning this inspiration must be on extra-Biblical grounds. On such a view, it cannot be important to believe that the Scriptures are inspired at all; and much less can it be important what we believe concerning the nature, extent or effects of such an inspiration. All these matters lie in the sphere of non-Biblical human theories. On such a view, the inspiration of the Scriptures cannot even be a Christian doctrine at all. So much as can be proved concerning it will belong to the sphere of private opinion.⁷⁰

Dr. Smith has deliberately rejected the doctrine of *plenary* inspiration and adopted a theory of *limited* inspiration. . . . Scriptures only contain the Word of God and are infallible only in matters of faith and practice. The historical origin of this theory was among the Socinians; it was adopted from them by the early Dutch Arminians; and from them by the Rationalist.”⁷¹

Warfield in his exposition of Smith’s view of limited inspiration (inerrancy) summarizes five points: 1) Limited inspiration holds that there is only biblical evidence for the inspiration of the prophets, not the scriptural text or written document. 2) It rejects the doctrine of plenary inspiration, the idea that inspiration and inerrancy apply to the complete text of Scripture. Denial of this, according to Warfield, forces the adoption of the theory that the Scriptures only contains the Word of God and is therefore allows for 3) infallibility only being applied to matters of faith and practice. As Warfield says, “It is in order that, under the cover of an attack on ‘inerrancy,’ all the barriers may be broken down which stand in the way of freely reconstructing the history of Israel from points of view not those of the Biblical historian.”⁷² Furthermore, 4) this allows for a personal impulse that allows one to practically adjust the Biblical doctrine of inspiration to incorporate “certain persona convictions . . . assumed conclusions derived from another sphere of inquiry.”⁷³ As Warfield eloquently puts it, limited inspiration says, “Let us hold to a shadowy Bible within the Bible which is removed beyond the reach of scientific tests, and in which we, may therefore, manage to believe *malgré* science—if we any longer wish to believe in it.”⁷⁴ This leads to 5) an approach that allows for the incorporation of the radical conclusions and methods of prevalent schools of Old and New Testament negative higher criticism. But as Warfield says, all this “does not reckon sufficiently with one fact. It has the Bible itself against it, and the Bible is always with us. When this criticism has been forgotten, the Bible will still be read by men, and will still convey to men its views of the course of the history by which the true religion has been given by God to man.”⁷⁵

Later, the doctrine of limited inspiration erupted at Fuller Seminary in the writings of Jack Rogers and Donald McKim (*The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, 1979). It was responded to definitively by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) in the late 1970 and 1980s and also by John Woodbridge in *Biblical Authority*, 1982. Woodbridge identifies the fundamental concept used to support their view as “the concept of *accommodation*.” That is,

God accommodated Himself to our human weakness and limited capacity to understand His thoughts by communicating to us through human words. . . . authors of Scripture . . . did not reflect upon truth with the same categories of Western logic that are familiar to us. They were not concerned to describe historical and ‘scientific’ items with great accuracy. In consequence, what we moderns consider to be the small ‘errors’ committed by the Bible’s human authors do not detract from biblical authority, for the Bible’s authority is not associated with its form of words but with Christ and His salvation message to which the words point.⁷⁶

At the foundation of this movement to limited inspiration (or inerrancy) is the view of truth that says it is to be found solely in authorial intent. That is the mind of the author, rather than the correspondence between a truth claim (spoken or written) with reality. Carl F. H. Henry in his closing address to Summit II of the ICBI, Henry writes,

But in recent years a different type of theft has emerged as some fellow evangelicals, along with non–evangelicals, wrest from the Bible segments they derogate as no longer the Word of God. Some now even introduce authorial intention or cultural context of language as specious rationalizations for this crime against the Bible, much as some rapist might assure me that he is assaulting my wife for my own or for her good. They misuse Scripture in order to champion as biblically true what in fact does violence to Scripture. It is one of the ironies of church history that even some professed evangelicals now speak concessively of divine revelation itself as culture–conditioned, and do so at the precise moment in Western history when the secular dogma of the cultural relativity of all truth and morality and religious beliefs need fervent challenging.⁷⁷

If authorial intent alone is what constitutes truth, then only the intention of the author is authoritative. Hence, this opens the door to subjective guessing and unbiblical and extra–biblical sources being an authoritative in interpreting the text.

Upon this historical influence and foundation, aware of it or not, limited inspiration has now manifested itself under the title of inerrancy. Now limited inerrancy has flourished among evangelical scholars. Such a position, regardless of its name, manifests itself in theology, history, science and so–called other unimportant matters.

Limited to Theological and Unimportant Matters

Some scholars have followed the tradition of Henry Smith's limited inspiration. But have now manifested under an approach that should be labeled "limited inerrancy." As just in Warfield's day, those advocating limited inspiration were willing to say they hold to the inspiration. They readily agreed with the statement that "the Bible is the inspired word of God." But as Warfield showed, the traditional meaning of such a statement was clearly altered and undermined. The same stands for inerrancy today. Many have agreed with the statement "the Bible is the inerrant word of God." But they have completely altered and undermined what is traditionally understood by the term "inerrant." Therefore, it is appropriate to describe them as holding 'limited inerrancy.'

In a similar manner of Warfield's book, we offer a simple exposition of three representatives of contemporary scholars who 1) affirm inerrancy as traditionally understood and 2) deny inerrancy (total inerrancy), when it comes to theological or unimportant matters.

The Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) began in 1949 with only one doctrinal statement: "The Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs." ETS voted in 2004 to accept the "Chicago Statement" of the ICBI as its point of reference for defining inerrancy.⁷⁸ It states, "For the purpose of advising members regarding the intent and meaning of the reference to biblical inerrancy in the ETS Doctrinal Basis, the Society refers members to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978)."⁷⁹ For ETS scholars believing in inerrancy, the officially accepted definition of the term "inerrancy" is that of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI).

Three members of ETS, who annually agreed with the doctrinal statement of ETS, have clearly published views that are not in line with limited inerrancy: Robert Gundry, Clark Pinnock, and Mike Licona.

Robert Gundry

In Robert Gundry's commentary on Matthew he states "Hence, 'Jesus said' or 'Jesus did' need not always mean that in history Jesus said or did what follows, but sometimes may mean that in the account at least partly constructed by Matthew himself Jesus said or did what follows."⁸⁰ Gundry asserts such a thing because he thinks, "Matthew treats us to history mixed with elements that cannot be called historical in a modern sense. All history writing entails more

or less editing of materials. But Matthew's editing often goes beyond the bounds we nowadays want a historian to respect. Matthew's subtractions, additions, and revisions of order and phraseology often show changes in substance; i.e., they represent developments of the dominical tradition that result in different meanings and departures from the actuality of events"⁸¹

Clark Pinnock (1937–2010)

Pinnock offered a rejection of Warfield's view of inerrancy: "Inerrancy as Warfield understood it was a good deal more precise than the sort of reliability the Bible proposes. The Bible's emphasis tends to be upon the saving truth of its message and its supreme profitability in the life of faith and discipleship."⁸²

Pinnock's view of truth is in line with the intentionalist view of truth: "All this means is that inerrancy is relative to the intention of the text. If it could be shown that the chronicler inflates some of the numbers he uses for his didactic purpose, he would be completely within his rights and not at variance with inerrancy"⁸³

He also rejects ICBI's statement on inerrancy:

*There are a large number of evangelicals in North America appearing to defend the total inerrancy of the Bible. The language they use seems absolute and uncompromising: "The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in anyway limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own" (Chicago Statement, Preamble). It sounds as if the slightest slip or flaw would bring down the whole house of authority. It seems as though we ought to defend the errorlessness of the Bible down to the last jot and tittle in order for it to be a viable religious authority."*⁸⁴

Such an intentionalist view of truth allows Pinnock to limit inerrancy. He says, "I recognize that the Bible does not make a technical inerrancy claim or go into the kind of detail associated with the term in the contemporary discussion. . . . Inerrancy is a metaphor for the determination to trust God's Word completely."⁸⁵

In applying this view to his understanding of the Old and New Testament, allows him to see myth and legend integrated into historical narrative. "In the narrative of the fall of Adam, there are numerous symbolic features (God molding man from dirt, the talking snake, God molding woman from Adam's rib, symbolic trees, four major rivers from one garden, etc.), so that it is natural to ask whether this is not a meaningful narration that does not stick only to factual matters."⁸⁶

Concerning the New Testament Pinnock says, “At most, [in the NT] there are fragments and suggestions of myth: for example, the strange allusion to the bodies of the saints being raised on Good Friday (Matt. 27:52) and the sick being healed through contact with pieces of cloth that had touched Paul’s body (Acts 19:11–12)” (*SP*, 124). And “There are cases in which the possibility of legend seems quite real. I mentioned the incident of the coin in the fish’s mouth (Matt. 17:24–27). . . . The event is recorded only by Matthew and has the feel of a legendary feature.”⁸⁷

Michael Licona

Michael Licona, a professor at Houston Baptist University, like the others before him, affirms inerrancy, albeit in a limited form. Many ETS members have even vouched for the orthodoxy of his views. Some ETS members have signed a statement proclaiming Licona’s views on Scripture to be orthodox: “We are in firm agreement that it [Licona’s view] is compatible with biblical inerrancy, despite objections to the contrary” (signed by Dan Wallace, Gary Habermas, W. David Beck, J. P. Moreland, Craig Blomberg, Douglas Moo, William Warren, and Craig Keener).⁸⁸

How can one hold to inerrancy and yet affirm that there may be legends in the Gospels? According to Licona, the answer is found in embracing the Greco–Roman genre view of the Gospels. He claims “it is often difficult to determine where history ends and legend begins”⁸⁹ He further writes, “Bios offered the ancient biographer great flexibility for rearranging material and inventing speeches . . . and they often included legends”⁹⁰

This methodology opens the door for Licona to see legendary embellishment in the New Testament Gospels. Consider the following from his book, *The Resurrection of Jesus*:

For this reason, we get a sense that the canonical Gospels are reading authentic reports of Jesus’ arrest and death . . . even if some embellishments are present.⁹¹

A possible candidate for embellishment is Jn 18:4–6.⁹²

It can forthrightly be admitted that the data surrounding what happened to Jesus is fragmentary and could possibly be mixed with legend, . . . We may also be reading poetic language of legend at certain points, such as the angels at the tomb (Mk 16:5–7; Mt 28:2–7; Lk 24:4–7; Jn 20:11–13).⁹³

[There is] “a weird residual fragment” in Matthew (Matt. 27:52–53). If taken literally, there would have been many, perhaps hundreds of empty tombs around Jerusalem on that first Easter”⁹⁴

This strange report in Matthew 27:52–53 attempts to retain the corporate harrowing of hell and the individual preascension appearances. However, “the magnificent harrowing of hell is already lost in that fragment’s present redaction.”⁹⁵

This methodology also allows him to affirm that there are contradictions in the Gospel accounts. Licona affirmed the following in a video interview:

So this didn’t really bother me in terms of if there were contradictions in the Gospels. I mean, I believe in biblical inerrancy but I also realized that biblical inerrancy is not one fundamental doctrines of Christianity. The resurrection is. So if Jesus rose from the dead, Christianity is still true even if it turned out that some things in the Bible weren’t. So um it didn’t really bother me a whole lot even if some contradictions existed. But it did bother a lot of Christians.⁹⁶

In a written interview with apologist Sean McDowell, Licona gives an example of how his methodology, which appeals to Greco–Roman biographies can be used to resolve differences.

I began to recognize that some of the differences resulted from compositional devices. Then when I went to the Gospels, I could see that the authors were probably employing the same compositional devices as other ancient biographers; specifically Plutarch. . . .

This is applied specifically to resolve discrepancies between the Gospel of Luke (Luke 7:1–10; cf. Matt. 8:5–13) and Matthew regarding the account of the centurion requesting Jesus to heal his servant. Licona says,

. . . the Gospel of Matthew narrates the story by having the centurion himself go to Jesus and make the request in person. Like Plutarch, Matthew simplified the story by *transferring* what one character said to the lips of another.⁹⁷

In effect, Licona is saying that Matthew’s Gospel records what a person said, but, for whatever reason, that person did not actually say it--and this is somehow compatible with inerrancy. He is also saying Matthew intentionally is in error about a matter. The person did not say it. This is the same as saying the word of God is in error.

Thus, Licona is affirming inerrancy but then denying inerrancy in practice. His view of inerrancy must be ‘limited’ in some sense since it allows for an error to be in the word of God. We can certainly debate on the best way to reconcile differences between the Gospels, but we

cannot use any method that arrives at the conclusion that the biblical text, the inspired word of God, is in error.

Licona's most recent book *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?* develops more fully his methodology of applying Greco–Roman biographies to understand Gospel difference. Licona says,

For our purposes, we only need to recognize that the New Testament Gospels bear strong affinity to Greco–Roman biography. Accordingly, we should not be surprised when the evangelists employ compositional devices similar to those used by ancient biographers. In fact, we should be surprised if they did not.⁹⁸

Some of these compositional devices, as explained by Licona, can clearly allow and involve error, regardless if they were intended or not:

Transferral: “When an author knowingly attributes words or deeds to a person that actually belonged to another person. . .”

Displacement: “When an author knowingly uproots an event from its original context and transplants it in another, the author has displaced the event.”

Conflation: “When an author combines elements from two or more events or people and narrates them as one . . .”

Compression: “When an author knowingly portrays events over a shorter period of time than the actual time it took . . .”

Simplification: “When an author adapts material by omitting or altering details that may complicate the overall narrative . . .”

Expansion of Narrative Details: “If minor details were unknown, they could be invented to improve the narrative while maintaining historical verisimilitude.”⁹⁹

Given this, Licona is free to employ these in the Gospels as literary devices. He says,

The evangelists' use of these devices most often appears to have no objective other than to follow the literary conventions of their day. . . . As a result, ancient authors, including the evangelists, may have reported the peripheral details either as they or their sources recalled them, crafted them, or even creatively reconstructed them as part of their literary artistry in writing a quality narrative.¹⁰⁰

A few examples suffice. When considering the Last Supper (Mark 14:17-25; Matthew 26:20-29; Luke 22:14-23; John 13:1-30; 1 Cor. 11:21-23), Licona says,

The most profound difference pertains to the day on which Jesus's last meal with his disciples is said to have occurred. . . . there are several elements in John's Gospel that suggests he has located the Last Supper a day earlier than what is portrayed in the Synoptics.¹⁰¹

When considering Jesus before the Sanhedrin and Peter's denial (Mark 14:53–72; Matthew 26:57–75; Luke 22:55–71; John 18:13–27), Licona concludes, "Thus, one or more of the evangelists reported the details as he or his sources recalled them, crafted, or creatively reconstructed them as part of their literary artistry."¹⁰²

When considering the crucifixion and death of Jesus (Mark 15:22–41; Matthew 27:33–56; Luke 23:33–49; John 19:17–37), Licona reasons,

If Plutarch can alter the year in which Caesar wept when considering the inferiority of his own accomplishments in comparison [sic] to those of Alexander in order to emphasize Caesar's ambitious character, John could alter the day and time of Jesus's crucifixion to symbolize the sacrificial quality of Jesus's death. And we have previously observed how either Mark or John changed the day when the woman anointed Jesus.¹⁰³

This is a flat contradiction, and it is contrary to the doctrine of inerrancy! When considering the resurrection accounts (Mark 16:1–8; Matthew 28:1–10, 16–20; Luke 24:1–51; John 20:1–29; 21:1–24). Licona rejects prior efforts to harmonize the Gospels, but his application of the Greco-Roman categories does not seem to yield better results. Hence, while Licona dismisses the possibility of myth with respect to the core resurrection story, he leaves the door open for many kinds of errors. Consider the following examples from Licona's *Why Are there Differences*:

Earlier we observed that Plutarch's treatment of events . . . [is] impossible to harmonize and observed him reworking his material in ways that are sometimes difficult to discern. We will observe some similar reworking of the resurrection narrative by the evangelists that are every bit as perplexing. In a few instances, they are even more so.¹⁰⁴

At minimum, it appears that either Matthew or John has relocated the appearances to Mary Magdalene. This shows the extent to which at least one of the evangelists or the sources from which he drew felt free to craft the story.¹⁰⁵

However, if the resurrection narratives in the Synoptics have not been conflated and greatly compressed, why is the initial appearance of the angels to the women absent in John? If Matthew (and the Synoptics) conflated and compressed elements in the narrative, of necessity they would have needed to redact other elements in order to improve the flow of the narrative.¹⁰⁶

Accordingly, either Luke conflated the first and second appearances to the male disciples, or John crafted the second appearances in order to rebuke those who like Thomas, heard about Jesus' resurrection and failed to believe.¹⁰⁷

It is possible that Matthew (and the Synoptics) have conflated and compressed numerous elements in the narrative and were forced to redact other elements in order to improve the

narrative flow or that one or more of the evangelists have engaged in a bit of creative reconstruction.¹⁰⁸

It is important to note in the above quotations that *intentionally* making up a story would be a lie, and no inspired writing could do this. And, *crafting* a story contrary to fact is a falsehood which is contrary to a divinely inspired writing.

Such an approach clearly leaves the door open for the Gospel writers to be mistaken or in error regarding just about any detail through the writing or reworking of their text, whether they intended it or not. Licona's ambition to defend the resurrection of Jesus is admirable, but what he and many others may fail to see is that the resurrection of Jesus is not the end of Christian apologetics or doctrine. Showing that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God is the end of Christian apologetics and the most fundamental and important doctrine. Both require that the teaching of Christ on the Bible be used. But if a historical method, such as Licona supposes, allows for legends and errors, even if deemed unimportant, then there is no way to limit or prevent the method from calling into question any teaching of Jesus Christ including Jesus' view of the Bible.¹⁰⁹

In Warfield's day, there were scholars who affirmed the inspiration of the Bible but viewed inspiration as *limited* or not applicable to areas the Bible speaks to which are deemed unimportant. This allowed them to embrace critical theories about the Bible that clearly undermined the integrity and truthfulness of God's word. So today, as we have shown, there are scholars who affirm the inerrancy of the Bible but must *limit* it to areas deemed important and deny it in areas deemed unimportant. But errors are clearly affirmed by the author concerning factual truth, regardless of what kind.

The Fallacies of Limited Inerrancy

Finally, we want to offer some brief responses to questions related to inerrancy that emerge from the previous review of the proponents and methods of limited inerrancy.¹¹⁰

What is the role of truth in the inerrancy debate?

From the time of Aristotle, truth has been held to be that which corresponds to reality. That is, if an affirmation or claim is made that something is true, then the affirmation is true if it corresponds to reality and it is false if it does not. There is no other understanding of truth that

can be offered which does not depend, directly or indirectly upon the correspondence view of truth. For anything to be true, our minds must conform to reality or the world the way it is. This is the basis for the total or complete inerrancy of the Bible. The Bible is true in everything it affirms or denies, regardless of what subject it touches on or teaches us.

By contrast, many limited inerrantists base their view on an intentionality view of truth which says, “A statement is true if it accomplishes what the author intended it to accomplish and a statement is false if it did not accomplish it.” This at first may appear to give room for one to affirm something as true which is really false, and we consider it true (even though it is false) if their intentions are right. But if this holds, then truth must involve factually incorrect statements that are in fact true (because intentions are right). Further, factually correct statements could be false (if they do not achieve their intentions). And persons would be what is true or false, rather than propositions (either corresponding to reality or not). If the intentionality view is right, not only is such a world unlivable, but such a world could never contain absolute truth that is something that is true for everyone, everywhere and for all time. Truth becomes something that can be created and changed by the intentions of persons. Indeed, some intentions accomplish their intention, but not all intentions are true. Lies can accomplish an intention. Hence, as a comprehensive view of truth, only the correspondence view is adequate.¹¹¹

How is inerrancy arrived from a study of Scripture?

Inerrancy is an epistemological foundational doctrine (teaching of Scripture) that is arrived at by a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning. All other doctrines, such as the deity of Christ and the Trinity are arrived at in the exact same way. First, it is based on “inductive” study of biblical texts which yield 1) the Bible is the word of God. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” 2) God cannot err. Hebrews 6:18 says, “. . . it is impossible for God to lie, . . .” (cf. Titus 1:2). It is then reasoned deducted from these two teachings of Bible: Therefore, The Bible cannot err. In short,

1. Bible is the word of God (2 Timothy 3:16).
2. God cannot err (Hebrews 6:18).
3. Therefore, The Bible cannot err.

To deny this argument, you must either say the Bible is not the word of God or that God can make mistakes, or both. There are no other options. If you affirm 1) the Bible is the word of God and 2) that God cannot lie. Then, you must believe in biblical inerrancy. To deny that inerrancy is an epistemological fundamental doctrine of the faith, which all other doctrines depend upon is a denial of inerrancy. It is an attack, implicitly or explicitly, upon the nature of God and it undermines the stability of Church which is built on the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. Furthermore, the Scriptures, as the word of God, claim to be completely true (Psalm 119:160; Proverbs 30:5; John 17:17). God as completely truthful (Numbers 23:19; Romans 3:4; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18, 1 John 1:5, 6). The Bible as taught by Christ is historically and scientifically true (Matthew 12:40; 19:4; 24:34; John 3:12). Hence, Scripture is equated with God's authority.¹¹²

It should also be noted that inerrancy as a doctrine only applies to the autographs or the final original text that is written or produced under the prophet's authority. Copies and translations of copies have a derived inspiration and authority from the final original text produced by the inspired prophet. This is what makes the inerrancy of the original so important to preserve doctrinally. If it is lost, then there is no guarantee as to what is true or false, with respect to what the Bible affirms, denies or teaches.

Did Jesus teach that the Bible was inerrant?

The clear and unequivocal answer is yes! Jesus of Nazareth taught that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant word of God. He did this by teaching its authority – Matthew 22:43; reliability – Matthew 26:54; finality – Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; sufficiency – Luke 16:31; indestructibility – Matthew 5:17, 18; unity – Luke 16:31; perspicuity – Luke 24:27; historicity – Matthew 12:40; facticity (scientifically) – Matthew 19:2-5 and yes, its inerrancy – Matthew 22:29, John 3:12; 17:17.

Not only did Jesus teach this about the Bible, but he also held against many critics that Daniel was a prophet (Matthew 22:15-16), that God created Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4-5), that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish (Matthew 12:40), Noah's Flood (Matthew 24:37-39), That there was one author of the book of Isaiah (Luke 4:17-20; Mark 7:6; John 12:37-41), and that David wrote Psalms (Matthew 22:43-45). Jesus affirmed over thirty-three events and persons in the Old Testament.¹¹³

Why must inerrancy apply to the entire (plenary) written text, even to so called unimportant things?

Paul said that “*All* Scripture is inspired by God . . . (1 Timothy 3:16, emphasis added, cf. 2 Peter 1:20–21). Inerrant means the Bible is wholly true (true in whole and in part), without error in everything affirmed or implied. And this is not just “spiritual” or “salvific truth.” What inspiration and inerrancy guarantees is the truth of all that the Bible teaches, implies, or entails spiritually and factually. We can certainly recognize that some truths in the Bible are more important than other truths. That Jesus rose from the dead is more important than Lazarus rising from the dead, but both must be equally true.

There are many things this view allows for in the Bible. For example, a parable can be told which does not mean that it really happened with real people (Luke 18:2). The Bible can record lies (Genesis 3:4). Figures of speech, such as exaggeration, can be used (Colossians 1:23). All of these are discovered by studying the language and context.

But inerrancy cannot allow for the Bible to affirm ‘A’ and for it to really be the case that it is ‘not A.’ When a limited inerrantist affirms that some unimportant area of the Bible is not true, then that part cannot be the word of God (since God cannot error). So, the limited inerrantist denies some part of the biblical text as not being the word of God. If any part of the Bible is not the word of God, then we have no assurance or reliable method to determine which parts are and are not the word of God. In the words of Christ, “If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (John 3:12).

To what extent is inerrancy compatible with higher criticism?

Higher criticism seeks to find answers to questions concerning the author and content of a biblical book. Who wrote it? When was it written? Why was it written? What kind of literature is it? These and other similar questions are all legitimate questions to be asked and pursued. However, the history of higher criticism reveals a negative side. Often theories higher critics have devised and argued for clearly compromise the inspiration and inerrancy of the text. Many higher critics are against the possibility of predictive prophecy and miracles. They think they must devise a natural explanation for everything the concerning the text. Examples of such negative theories include the documentary hypothesis that thinks the Pentateuch could not have

been written by a single prophet in the time of Moses. Multiple authorships and many late dates for Old and New Testament books so as to eliminate the possibility of predictive prophecy.¹¹⁴

Such an approach often goes against what the biblical text itself affirms about itself, its author, and why and how it was written. Granted, sometimes we cannot fully answer the questions higher critics want to answer. But when their theories go against the inspiration of the Bible, evangelicals who hold to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible cannot hold and use these theories without undermining or compromising, implicitly or explicitly Christian doctrine. This is exactly what has been done with the above examples concerning limited inerrancy. As J. Barton Payne stated it positively, “any theory about the circumstances of literary origin is acceptable if it adequately incorporates the biblical data and proceeds to develop its conclusions from them”.¹¹⁵ To guard against negative higher criticism, Payne advises that we must keep in mind biblical statements about its own composition and the historicity of the biblical content.

Why Jesus did not accommodate to false beliefs?

The theory of accommodation says that Jesus did not affirm inspiration but simply accommodated Himself to false Jewish beliefs. For example, the accommodationists say, that Jesus of Nazareth, being the Son of God, accommodated himself to the widely accepted false beliefs of his day. So, for example, because it was widely accepted in Jesus’ day that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, Jesus accommodates this belief by saying Moses wrote it. Some limited inerrantists following the theories of negative higher criticism today, thinking they know more than the Jews of Jesus’ day, do not hold Moses wrote the Pentateuch. But Jesus being God incarnate must know the truth about the matter and therefore must have accommodated himself to the erroneous cultural beliefs of his day. This is nothing short of attributing error and deception to Jesus Christ himself.

Instead, to avoid charging Christ with error or deception one must say that Christ adapted himself to the cultural beliefs of the day. Indeed, as God incarnate, Jesus cannot be charged with any error or deception. All that Christ affirms must be completely true in earthly matters as well as spiritual matters, and yes even unimportant matters. But he certainly can adapt himself and his views to fit in the culture of his day without having to accommodate to an erroneous or deceptive belief. This means Jesus may have limited what he said about a matter or not even addressed a matter, indeed the text tells us Jesus only taught what the Father wanted him to teach. Further,

Christ had no problem confronting erroneous beliefs in his day with the truth of Scripture. Consider that Jesus did not accommodate himself to many false Jewish beliefs (Matthew. 5:21, 28, 32; 15:1–9; 22:29; 23; John 2:13f.; 3:10).

In short, *accommodation* incorrectly holds that Jesus accommodated to human error and committed actual errors. He disguised truth, compromised God’s truth and used myth when truth should have been used. Truth in this approach is only what seems to be.

Adaptation, on the other hand, is an adaptation to the human’s limited understanding. Jesus spoke partial truths, disclosed truth in common human language, communicated God’s truth in understandable and anthropomorphic terms. Adaptation rests on the view that we can know God and what really is true, even though we apprehend it without completely comprehending it.

Some have suggested perhaps Jesus since he was human, was limited in knowledge and just ignorant on the topic. However, the New Testament clearly shows that Jesus had supernormal knowledge (John 1; 2:25). He said “truly, truly” for emphasis many times in John’s Gospel. Jesus emphasized His authority in saying “I say to you” (Matt 5:21ff.) to place his words alone side the Old Testament Scripture. At the end of his ministry on earth, Jesus claimed, “all authority in heaven and earth” (Matthew 28:18). Therefore, whatever limits there were on Jesus as a man in what he did not teach, there were no limitations on his authority in what he did teach (John 3:10).

How do we resolve Bible difficulties (or apparent contradictions) without compromising inerrancy?

There are many difficult passages in the Bible. There is much value in pursuing deeper study to explain them. Many have and continue to do this. But even as a scholar who accepts the Bible as the word of God, one cannot use methods or techniques, and stay within the evangelical tradition since lead one to conclude there is an error or actual contradiction in the Bible. This will clearly lead that person to reject inerrancy (as we have shown above) and embrace limited inerrancy. That is, we cannot conclude the Bible teaches ‘non A,’ but history or science concludes ‘A,’ therefore the Bible is in error (or wrong). We certainly can study the Bible more, its historical background, language, literature, etc. We certainly can study history and science more. But if the doctrine of inerrancy is true, then ultimately what God created and holds in existence through all time, must be in agreement with what He inspired in a written text. We can

certainly say we do not understand or know enough, but we cannot say the word of God is in error.¹¹⁶

In short, limited inerrancy undermines the authority of the Bible, claiming that only some, but not all, is the Word of God. It is contrary as we have seen to such verses as 2 Timothy 3:16 and others. It undermines the authority of Christ who affirmed the whole Old Testament including parts that deal with history and science. It does not provide any definitive way to distinguish between important and non-important texts. It fails to recognize that many historical and scientific parts of the Bible are inseparable. Limited inerrancy cannot answer how if only part (not the whole) of the Bible is God’s Word, how do we know which part are or are not God’s word? Finally, stressing that only intention of the author is authoritative opens the door to subjective guessing and unbiblical and extra-biblical sources being authoritative in interpreting the text.

Summary and Conclusion

There is a seismic shift in the inerrancy debate from the historic evangelical view of unlimited inerrancy to this different evangelical position of limited inerrancy. While the two views are radically different, there is a subtle shift from one to the other which can be contrasted as follows:

Unlimited Inerrancy	Limited Inerrancy
Whole Bible is Inerrant	Only Parts of the Bible are Inerrant
Bible is Inerrant in Intent and Fact	Bible is Inerrant in Intent but not in Facts
Bible is Inerrant in History & Science	Bible is not Inerrant in History and Science
Bible is Inerrant in Purpose & Propositions	Bible is not Inerrant in All Propositions

The second view denies full inerrancy and is both historically and theologically unacceptable.¹¹⁷ It is contrary to the firm theological teaching that 1) God cannot err, and that 2) The Bible is the Word of God. Thus, the Bible cannot err. So, to deny inerrancy is to deny that God cannot err or to deny that the Bible is the Word of God or both.

What is more, the whole Bible, and all of its parts, is inerrant. To deny this is to hold that part of the World of God can err—which is theological nonsense.

Such a shift allows one who claims to believe in inerrancy but deny that it is *necessary* to believe it in inerrancy to be orthodox. That is, they defend the orthodoxy of those who deny the orthodox view of inerrancy. Besides being an unacceptably short step on the slippery slope to a flat outright denial of inerrancy, this position undermines the foundational principle that the Bible is the written Word of God. In short, like its historic precursors, and contrary to its opponents, the orthodox view on inerrancy affirms that the Bible as a whole, and the Bible in all its parts, is inerrant in all that it affirms on whatever topic it speaks.

Copyright © 2018
Norman L. Geisler, Douglas E. Potter, DefendingInerrancy.com
All rights reserved.

Norman L. Geisler, Ph.D., is the co-founder of Southern Evangelical Seminary and the co-founder of Veritas International University. He has published dozens of books on the Bible and biblical inerrancy. He was a member of the Drafting Committee of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy between 1977-1987 and also served as the ICBI's General Editor and Director of Publications.

Douglas E. Potter, D.Min., is the Assistant Professor of Theology and Apologetics and the Director Doctor of Ministry Program Southern Evangelical Seminary. He is the author of *Developing a Christian Apologetics Educational Program* (Wipf & Stock, 2010) and the co-author (with Norman Geisler) of the *Teacher's Guide for Twelve points that Show Christianity is True* (NGIM, 2015), *A Popular Survey of Bible Doctrine* (NGIM, 2016), and *The Bible: Its Origin, Nature & Collection* (NGIM, 2016).

Notes

¹ Having at least two very different meanings, the term “neo-evangelical” warrants clarification. Seventy years ago, when Harold J. Ockenga first coined the term and spearheaded the launch of the neo-evangelical movement, he and other neo-evangelicals (Harold Lindsell, Carl F. H. Henry, Edward Carnell, Gleason Archer, Charles Fuller, Billy Graham, etc.) were primarily working to provide a scholarly defense of the historic, orthodox position on the full reliability, infallibility, inerrancy, and authority of the Scriptures against the heterodox bibliology of the modernist movement. Ockenga stated that they saw a great “need for the writing of a new evangelical literature, based upon evangelical principles and, in particular, upon an inerrant Scripture,” the need for “a highly academic theological institution founded upon an infallible Scripture,” and the need for “a magazine which would defend the evangelical faith on an intellectual level.” He also stated “The basic premise [of the neo-evangelical movement] was our adoption of an inerrant Scripture... [which] differed from neo-orthodoxy in its emphasis on the written Word as inerrant, over against the Word of God which was above and different from the Scripture but was manifested in Scripture.” (Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* [Zondervan, 1976].) Whereas modernism radically challenged the traditional, orthodox Protestant evangelical bibliology, the neo-evangelical movement was a passionate and thoughtful resurgence, renewal, reaffirmation, and advancement of it. However, we are not using the term neo-evangelical in Ockenga’s sense here. In this essay, we use this term with modern connotations of departures away from the traditional bibliology and theology held by evangelicals of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. The “progressive” neo-evangelicals of today espouse a view of the Scriptures that the conservative neo-evangelicals of the 1940s and 1950s were working to protect against.

² *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, paragraph 45.

³ *First Apology* 36, emphasis added in these quotations.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Justin’s *Hortatory Oration to the Greeks*, 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸ *Against Heresies* 2.28.2.

⁹ *Ibid.* 3.1.1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.5.1.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 2.28.2.

¹² *De Principiis* preface, 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.1.9.

¹⁴ *City of God* 11.3.

¹⁵ *Letters* 82.1.3.

¹⁶ *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon* 11.5.

¹⁷ *Sermons on New Testament Lessons* 32.8.

¹⁸ *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon* 11.6

¹⁹ *Commentary on Psalms* 1.4.

²⁰ *Letters* 23.3.3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 82.1.3.

²² *Ibid.*, 82.3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 23.3.3.

²⁴ Angelus Walz, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Westminster: Newman, 1951), 73.

²⁵ M. D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), 248.

²⁶ *Summa Theologica* 1a.1, 10, emphasis added in these quotations.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1a.1, 2 ad 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1a.1, 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 3a1, 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 1a.1, 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Summa Theologica* 2adae.174, 4 ad 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2a2ae. 173, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae, 172, 3.

-
- ³⁶ *De veritate* 12, 4, ad 1; *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae, 172, 3.
- ³⁷ *Summa theologica* 2a2ae. 171, 6.
- ³⁸ *Commentary on Hebrews*, I, lect. 4.
- ³⁹ *Summa theologica* 2a2ae. 172, 3, ad 1.
- ⁴⁰ *Summa theologica*, 2a2ae. 2, 5.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.* 2a2ae 1, 6, ad 1.
- ⁴² *De veritate* XIV, 10, ad 11.
- ⁴³ *Commentary on John 21*, lect. 3.
- ⁴⁴ *Summa Theologica* 1a. 1, 8.
- ⁴⁵ J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehman, eds., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg and Fortress, 1960), 52:46.
- ⁴⁶ M. Rue, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus: Wartburg, 1944), 35.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 36–37.
- ⁴⁹ *Luther's Works*, 30:105.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 35:153.
- ⁵¹ Reu, *The Scriptures*, 17.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 37:26.
- ⁵³ John Urquhart, *Inspiration and Accuracy of the Holy Scriptures* (London: Marshall, 1895), 129–130.
- ⁵⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.7.1.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.4.8.6.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.4.8.9.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.18.9.
- ⁵⁹ Calvin, *Commentaries* Matt. 27:9.
- ⁶⁰ B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (1881 reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 29.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 22–23.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 36.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 14–15.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 80, emphasis in original.
- ⁶⁶ Warfield, *Inspiration*, 17.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ⁶⁸ J. Marcellus Kik, “Introduction” in Benjamin B. Warfield, *Limited Inspiration* (1894 reprint ed., Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1974), iii.
- ⁶⁹ Warfield, *Limited Inspiration*, 9.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 50.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 50.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 52. The French word *malgré* means “despite.”
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.
- ⁷⁶ John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 21.
- ⁷⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, “The Bible and the Conscience of Our Age” in Earl D. Radmacher & Robert D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, Zondervan, 1984), 917.
- ⁷⁸ J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, gen. eds., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 113.
- ⁷⁹ See *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁰ Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Eerdmans, 1982), 630.
- ⁸¹ Robert Gundry, *Matthew*, 623.
- ⁸² Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 75.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 78.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 224–225.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

-
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., 125.
- ⁸⁸ The full list of signers can be found here Michael Patton, “Press Release: Michael Licona Responds to Norm Geisler” *The Theology Program Blog*, September 8, 2011. Accessed March 26, 2018, <https://credohouse.org/blog/press-release-michael-licona-response-to-norm-geisler>.
- ⁸⁹ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (IVP Academic, 2010), 34.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., 34.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 306.
- ⁹² Ibid., 306, n. 114.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 185–186.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 527–528.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 530.
- ⁹⁶ Mike Licona, “Mike Licona Discusses What Makes a Bible Contradiction.” *YouTube*, November 23, 2012, accessed February 15, 2018, http://www.youtu.be/TJ8rZukh_Bc.
- ⁹⁷ Sean McDowell, “New Research on Gospel Contradictions, Interview with Mike Licona.” *Sean McDowell Blog*, February 12, 2016. Accessed February 15, 2018, <http://seanmcdowell.org/blog/new-research-on-gospel-contradictions-interview-with-mike-licona>, (emphasis his).
- ⁹⁸ Michael R. Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?* (New York: Oxford Press, 2017), 5.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid, 20.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 183–184.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid, 155.
- ¹⁰² Ibid, 160–161.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid, 163–164.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 171.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 176.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 177.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 177–178.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 182.
- ¹⁰⁹ John Wenham, *Christ & the Bible*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1994).
- ¹¹⁰ For more on an exposition and defense of inerrancy see Norman L. Geisler & William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).
- ¹¹¹ Norman L. Geisler, “The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 548 (October–December 1980); 327–339. Also at <http://normangeisler.com/concept-of-truth-in-the-inerrancy-debate/>.
- ¹¹² Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. 2nd ed. (P & R Pub., 1980).
- ¹¹³ See John Wenham, *Christ & the Bible*.
- ¹¹⁴ For an analysis and response to negative higher critical theories, see Gleason Archer, *Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Moody Press, 2007).
- ¹¹⁵ J. Barton Payne, “Higher Criticism and Biblical Inerrancy” in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Zondervan, 1980), 96.
- ¹¹⁶ For more on how to study and resolve Bible difficulties in a manner that preserves biblical inerrancy see Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008). Most of these solutions to Bible difficulties are found at <http://defendinginerrancy.com/bible-difficulties/>. Also see Gleason Archer, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).
- ¹¹⁷ As shown above many throughout history believed and taught full inerrancy.