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Evangelical Self-Identity and the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy

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Carl F. H. Henry—Fundamentalist?

One late afternoon in the early 1990s, Dr. Carl F. H. Henry shuffled along to his next appointment on the grounds of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.¹ He appeared deep in thought. I was walking toward my car and caught up with him on the sidewalk. I had known Dr. Henry since my boyhood days. My father and Dr. Henry had been colleagues at Fuller Theological Seminary in the 1950s.

Henry heard my footsteps and turned around and warmly greeted me. And yet he did not seem his normal buoyant self. Sensing something amiss, I asked him what was the matter. He replied that he had recently experienced an unpleasant conversation with an evangelical colleague from off campus. This person had accused Dr. Henry of being a “fundamentalist.” Henry expressed how perplexed he was

¹An earlier version of this chapter was delivered at Wheaton College on October 26, 2009, as the Armerding Lecture entitled “Wheaton College at 150: Faithful to the Church Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy.” The present version of the essay has been revised and expanded.

by the charge. He was apparently upset and saddened by the way the conversation had unfolded.

Upon first blush, the critic's charge did not make any sense to me. After all, Carl Henry was one of the prime architects of the post-World War II evangelical resurgence. He had penned the landmark book *The Uneasy Conscience of American Fundamentalism*. He had challenged the fundamentalist movement to reflect on "the social implications of its message for the non-Christian world." He wrote, "Today, Protestant Fundamentalism although heir-apparent to the supernaturalist gospel of the Biblical and Reformation minds, is a stranger, in its predominant spirit, to the vigorous social interest of its ideological forebears."² Although critical of aspects of American fundamentalism, Henry affirmed many of the same doctrinal "fundamentals" as those of fundamentalists. Nevertheless, in the 1940s and 1950s, he clearly began to identify himself more as an evangelical than as a fundamentalist. From 1947 until 1956, he taught at Fuller Theological Seminary, an evangelical school. From 1956 to 1968, Henry served as the editor of the flagship evangelical journal *Christianity Today*. Moreover, he had reflected seriously about defining traits of evangelical identity. In 1976, he had published the book *Evangelicals in Search of Identity*.³ Consequently, when an evangelical scholar called Dr. Henry a fundamentalist, he had good reason to be nonplussed. Moreover, he apparently felt he had been wrongly labeled.

At the moment of our brief sidewalk encounter, I did not ask Henry what warrant his critic had proffered in making the charge. I later tried to surmise why the respected critic had described Dr. Henry, a man with impeccable "evangelical credentials," as a fundamentalist. Had the critic simply uttered the charge in anger? I really did not know. But as an admirer of the critic, I wanted to think the best. I concluded this person had apparently believed in good faith that Henry's commitment to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy rendered him a fundamentalist.

The Historic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy

By the early 1990s, a powerful historiography had emerged that portrayed the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as "fundamentalist" and not as an "evangelical" doctrine. With this historiography in mind, the critic

²Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of American Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003 [1947]), 39.

³Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976).

may have felt fully justified in labeling Dr. Henry a fundamentalist. For the critic, Henry would have been simply mistaken in identifying himself as an evangelical.

Obviously, my reconstruction of what motivated the critic's labeling is speculative. What is not speculative, however, is the fact that the way historians recount the historical trajectories of various doctrines often affects our views of these same doctrines. If, for example, historians portray a doctrine as theologically innovative, a departure from what the Christian churches have consistently taught, we may suspect that the doctrine has departed from the "faith once delivered." Evangelicals have a vested interest in studying the history of doctrine.

Identifying and adhering to central church doctrines and confessions is a very important thing for us even if we uphold Scripture as our ultimate, final authority. The enterprise can provide us with a better understanding of our own evangelical theological self-identity. Do our beliefs about scriptural authority, for example, reside within identifiable central teachings of the historic Christian church? If they do not, we may have become doctrinal innovators regarding our views of Scripture despite our intentions to uphold orthodox Christian teaching.

Heeding and adhering to central church doctrines and confessions can also help steer us away from theological mishaps. In the volume *The Mark of Jesus*, Timothy George, Dean of Beeson Divinity School, describes well the value of statements of faith:

How do such statements of faith serve the cause of evangelical unity? Perhaps they are best compared to the guardrails that help a driver especially in bad weather, to negotiate the treacherously narrow road and hairpin curves of a dangerous mountain highway. Such guardrails establish limits that protect us from the dangers of the gaping ravines to the right and to our left. Only a fool with suicidal tendencies would want to drive across a range of mountains such as the Alps in Switzerland without guardrails. It would be equally foolish, of course, to mistake the guardrails for the road, for when we start driving on the rails it is certain that catastrophe is imminent!

For the Christian there is only one road. Jesus said, "I am the way [road] and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Or, as Augustine put it, Christ is "both our native country and himself also the road to that country." This analogy is not a perfect one, of course; still, we might push it a little further to say that the Bible is our road map, a divinely given and indispensable resource that helps us to find the

road and keeps us on it while the Holy Spirit helps us to see both the road and the guardrails [statements of faith] and to keep both in proper perspective.⁴

In this essay, I will reiterate the thesis that biblical inerrancy has been a church doctrine or Augustinian central teaching of the Western Christian churches, including evangelical Protestant churches. Consequently, evangelicals who affirm the doctrine of biblical inerrancy are by no means doctrinal innovators. By biblical inerrancy, I mean in shorthand the doctrine that the Bible is infallible for faith and practice as well as for matters of history and science.⁵ By the expression *church doctrine*, I am referring to a widespread shared belief of Christian churches that have had a historical existence in the West.⁶

The New View of Biblical Inerrancy

As already observed, not all theologians and church historians are agreed that biblical inerrancy has in point of fact been a central church teaching among Western churches. Indeed, during the past forty years an influential historiography has emerged arguing that biblical inerrancy is a doctrinal innovation—the provenance of which is American

⁴Timothy George and John Woodbridge, *The Mark of Jesus: Loving in a Way the World Can See* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2005), 82–83.

⁵The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy includes matters of faith and practice and history and “God’s acts in creation” within its definition of inerrancy: “Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives” (1.4). A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield provided a carefully nuanced definition of biblical inerrancy. The Bible provides us “a correct statement of facts or principles intended to be affirmed. . . . Every statement accurately corresponds to truth just as far forth as affirmed” (*Inspiration* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 (1881)], 28–29). Moisés Silva points out that their definition assumed “that the Bible would be interpreted responsibly, and such a proper interpretation consists in determining what the original author meant, what he intended (“Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy,” in *B. B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007], 82).

⁶Cf. B. B. Warfield, “The Church Doctrine of Inspiration,” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 105–28. The early church “rules of faith” and affirmations such as the Apostles’, the Nicene, the Chalcedonian, and the Athanasian creeds were often perceived as summary statements of the apostolic faith and encapsulating doctrine of the church catholic. In his *Commonitorium* (AD 434), Vincent of Lerins wrote: “Now in the Catholic Church itself we take the greatest care to hold THAT WHICH HAS BEEN BELIEVED EVERYWHERE, ALWAYS AND BY ALL.” He believed that reliance on the standards of universality, antiquity, and consent would help Christians to identify apostolically warranted interpretations of Scripture and eschew beliefs that were heretically innovative (“novel contagion”). See Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 91–93.

fundamentalism, itself portrayed as a doctrinally innovative movement and thus suspect.

As late as the 1970s, most evangelicals assumed that biblical inerrancy was one of their nonnegotiable fundamental beliefs. For example, in 1975, in a book David Wells and I edited, *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, Martin Marty of the University of Chicago indicated that evangelicals and fundamentalists shared a belief in the doctrine of biblical inerrancy: “Both evangelicals and fundamentalists insist on the ‘inerrancy of scripture’ as being the most basic of all their fundamentals.”⁷ But under the influence of the new historiography, a good number of historians and theologians later balked at accepting the validity of Professor Marty’s assessment. They claimed only fundamentalists uphold biblical inerrancy, not evangelicals. By the 1980s, Marty himself identified the doctrine of biblical inerrancy more as a fundamentalist doctrine than as a “most basic” doctrine of evangelicals.

This new historiography proposed that biblical inerrancy is supposedly neither an evangelical doctrine nor a central teaching of the Western Christian churches. Rather, it is a prototypic fundamentalist belief originating in the late nineteenth century. The actual expression *fundamentalist* did not gain widespread currency until 1920. In that year, Curtis Lee Laws (1868–1946) introduced the expression in an editorial of the *Watchman Examiner*: “We suggest that those who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the fundamentals shall be called ‘Fundamentalists.’”⁸

The new historiography that biblical inerrancy is a fundamentalist doctrine has shaped the thinking of a number of distinguished Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians and church historians.

In 1970, Ernest Sandeen, a historian, helped launch this influential historiography in a book entitled, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930*.⁹ He proposed the seminal thesis that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy in the original autographs was created by A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield in their

⁷David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 200.

⁸Cited in David Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* (Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1986), 195.

⁹Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). The University of Chicago Press published a paperback edition of this book in 2008.

1881 article “Inspiration.” According to Sandeen, these two Presbyterians, feeling hard-pressed by burgeoning higher critical studies in their day, crafted the doctrine supposedly as a means to escape the negative entailments of these critical studies for the Bible’s authority. Professor Sandeen was emboldened to claim that the doctrine of inerrancy in the original autographs “did not exist in either Europe or America prior to its formulation in the last half of the nineteenth century.”¹⁰ He further charged that the Princeton doctrine of an inerrant Bible “was maintained only by recourse to completely useless original autographs.”¹¹ He disputed the claim of Hodge and Warfield that their doctrine of Scripture reflected the Catholic teaching of the Christian churches since the Patristic era. For Sandeen, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy in the original autographs represented a non-heuristic doctrinal innovation. It strayed not only from the Calvinist Westminster Confession but also from the central teachings of the Western churches. Nevertheless, fundamentalists, assuming that the belief was biblically warranted, allegedly appropriated the doctrinal innovation and converted it into a nonnegotiable fundamental of their movement.

How might we respond to those who advocate Sandeen’s interpretation, or ones similar to it—that is, who portray the belief not as an evangelical church doctrine but as a misleading formulation of late nineteenth-century Presbyterians, especially A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield? One obvious step to take is to assess the historical validity of Sandeen’s thesis that the doctrine of inerrancy in the original autographs did not exist in Europe or America before 1881, or before 1850.

To this latter endeavor, I now turn. First, I will propose (citing initially particular Roman Catholics) that in fact a number of leading churchmen in the West affirmed the truthfulness of Scripture for matters of faith and practice as well as history and “science.” They thereby contributed to an Augustinian tradition regarding biblical inerrancy. To demonstrate this point, I will offer a brief reception-history sketch of the way biblical inerrancy was perceived by these churchmen. By reception history, I mean the reconstruction of a history of the perceptions of individuals regarding a particular idea, an event, a

¹⁰Ernest Sandeen, *The Origins of Fundamentalism: Toward A Historical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 14.

¹¹Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, 128.

phenomenon, or material objects.¹² For example, Professor Sandeen provided his readers with a certain perception of the history of biblical authority. Our primary question would therefore be, Does Sandeen's perception or historical reconstruction correspond with the views of biblical authority evidenced by the churchmen we are bringing to the witness stand? If Sandeen's thesis is valid, we should expect to find no credible advocates of biblical inerrancy in the original autographs before 1850 or 1881.

Second, we will revisit the same history of biblical authority from the Patristic era until the late nineteenth century, but this time we will call to the witness stand an essentially different set of witnesses and authorities who will testify in the main about the views of Protestants. Some of these witnesses were not themselves partisans of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Nevertheless, they did acknowledge that such was a central church doctrine of the Western churches, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. Frequently, testimonies of nonpartisans are of special worth, issuing as they do from witnesses not suspected of making claims about biblical inerrancy owing to ecclesiastical or confessional loyalties.

Augustine on Inerrancy

Let us begin by bringing to the witness stand a number of persons who will help establish for us the premise that an Augustinian belief in the truthfulness of Scripture constituted a major church doctrine in the West (among Roman Catholics).

What better person to invite as our star witness to describe the Augustinian teaching about Scripture's truthfulness than St. Augustine (354–430) himself? After all, as we shall see in our brief reception history, Augustine's views on the Bible's infallibility were frequently cited by later theologians and perceived as tantamount to a central church doctrine or tradition for many Roman Catholics and Protestants. Hans Küng observed, "St. Augustine's influence in regard to

¹²Professor Harold Marcuse, University of California at Santa Barbara, defines reception history as "the history of the meanings that have been imputed to historical events. It traces the different ways in which participants, observers, historians and other retrospective interpreters have attempted to make sense of events both as they unfolded and over time since then, to make those events meaningful for the present in which they lived and live" (<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/receptionhist.htm>, accessed Oct. 19, 2009). Jason Falck informed me of this reference.

inspiration and inerrancy prevailed throughout the Middle Ages and right into the modern age.”¹³

Augustine clearly affirmed as a nonnegotiable church doctrine that there are no errors in sacred Scripture. Such was a working premise for him, an essential guardrail if you will. When St. Jerome in his commentary on Galatians 2:14 intimated that Paul had relied upon a “white lie,” Augustine delivered a sharp if not alarmist rejoinder:

It seems to me that the most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books: that is to say that the men by whom the Scripture has been given to us, and committed to writing, did put down in these books anything false. . . . If you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement . . . , 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, . . . the author declared what was not true.¹⁴

Whatever we may think about Augustine’s “all or nothing” logic regarding the significance of one error, it is clear the Bishop of Hippo believed the Bible is “true” through and through. It is without error, or, if you will, inerrant.

A number of Augustine’s contemporaries had pointed to supposed errors in Scripture as the basis for their attacks on the Christian religion. In response to their charges, Augustine wrote *The Harmony of the Gospels*. He indicated that he felt obliged to confute unbelievers who denied the harmony of the four Gospels and affirmed the existence of errors in Scripture.

And in order to carry out this design to a successful conclusion, we must prove that the writers in question do not stand in any antagonism to each other. For those adversaries are in the habit of adducing this as the primary allegation in all their vain objections, namely that the evangelists are not in harmony with each other.¹⁵

¹³Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Enquiry* (London: Collins, 1972), 174. For Augustine’s views of Scripture, see A. D. R. Polman, *Word of God according to St. Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

¹⁴Augustine, *Letters of St. Augustine* 28.3.

¹⁵Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels* 1.7.10.

A further claim of Augustine became a salient component of a church doctrine about the truthfulness of Scripture. In his AD 405 letter to Faustus the Manichean, Augustine provided an explanation regarding the ways a reader may have supposed there are “errors” in the extant copies of Scripture. He wrote:

I confess to your Charity that I have learned to yield this respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. 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.¹⁶

In sum, Augustine proposed a threefold explanation of the provenance of supposed errors within Scripture. If you believed you had spotted one, it was because you had encountered a manuscript error, or the translator of your text had engaged in a faulty translation, or you had simply misunderstood what Scripture was saying. By Augustine’s day, some Christian scholars were practicing a form of lower scriptural criticism, that is, attempting to remove copyists’ errors from extant copies of the Scripture.

Augustine also argued that Scripture is written in a language accommodated to the weakness of our understanding.¹⁷ This gracious divine accommodation helps us with our frail minds to understand Scripture. Some passages of Scripture are written in the language of appearance—how things appear to us. Scripture is not written in a way to render it as a “scientific” textbook. Rather, when it describes the natural world, it does so truthfully (without error) but not necessarily in exhaustive and overly precise terms.

Considerable confusion has recently emerged in evangelical circles regarding what the Augustinian doctrine of accommodation represents, some evangelical scholars portraying a Socinian doctrine of accommodation as if it were an Augustinian definition of accommodation.¹⁸

¹⁶ Augustine, *Letters of St. Augustine* 82.3.

¹⁷For Augustine’s view of accommodation, see Polman, *Word of God according to St. Augustine*; Stephen D. Benin, *The Footprints of God: Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 94–112.

¹⁸A notable example of the exchanging of a “Socinian” definition of accommodation for an Augustinian perspective is found in Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

According to the Socinian definition, God accommodated Scripture to the faulty cosmologies of the biblical authors. The result: we have an errant Scripture owing to imported errors drawn from these faulty cosmologies that allegedly informed the writing of the biblical authors. By contrast, Augustine's view of accommodation did not have as an entailment that errors are found in Scripture. The Bible may describe the natural world simply, but truthfully as it is. Richard Muller clarifies further the differing meanings of a Socinian view of accommodation as opposed to an Augustinian view.¹⁹ The Princetonian Charles Hodge argued that it was the dangerous advocacy of a Socinian view of accommodation that contributed to the undermining of a high view of Scripture at the turn of the nineteenth century in Germany among Protestants.²⁰

Eck on Inerrancy

We will now invite our second witness to the stand, Johannes Eck (1496–1543), a Roman Catholic contemporary of Martin Luther.²¹ In 1518, Eck became alarmed that Erasmus, the brilliant Roman Catholic classicist and competent biblical scholar, had indicated that Matthew had made a mistake in substituting one word for another. Erasmus was quite explicit about his point of view in a letter of response to Eck: “Nor, in my view, would the authority of the whole of Scripture be instantly imperiled, as you suggest, if an evangelist by a slip of memory did put one name for another, Isaiah for instance instead of Jeremiah, for this is not a point on which anything turns.”²² In the same passage, Erasmus, a skilled debater, tried to shelter himself from potential charges of heterodoxy by pointing out that he never had said

¹⁹Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 19, on *accommodatio*. See also Glenn Sunshine, “Accommodation in Calvin and Socinus: A Study in Contrasts” (MA thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1985); Zbigniew Ogonowski, “Faustus Socinus 1539–1604,” in *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland, 1560–1600*, ed. Jill Raitt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 195–209.

²⁰Charles Hodge had firsthand knowledge of theological developments in Germany owing to his studies there. He published Hugh Rose's “The State of the Protestant Church in Germany,” *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 2 (1826): 391–501. During the second half of the eighteenth century, some 31 volumes were published in Germany devoted to the subject of biblical accommodation. Many apparently advocated a Socinian definition.

²¹Concerning Luther's famous debate with Eck at Leipzig, see Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New York: Image, 1992), 246–47, 262, 299–300.

²²Letter 844, to Johann Maier von Eck, May 15, 1518, in *The Correspondence of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 6.28.

explicitly that an actual error existed in Scripture: “I would not wish to say this because I think the apostles ever did make mistakes, but because I deny that the presence of some mistake must needs shake the credit of the whole of Scripture.”²³

Now, Eck, respectful of Erasmus’s reputation for scholarship (“most learned of men”), would have none of Erasmus’s concession that an error existed as well in Matthew 2. For Eck, it was Augustine who had helped form his convictions regarding the church doctrine of Scripture. Wrote Eck:

First of all then, to begin at this point, many people are offended at your having written in your notes on the second chapter of Matthew the words, “or because the evangelists themselves did not draw evidence of this kind from books, but trusted as men will to memory and made a mistake.” For in these words you seem to suggest that the evangelists wrote like ordinary men, in that they wrote this in reliance on their memories and failed to inspect the sources, and so for this reason made a mistake.²⁴

Then Eck cited what he deemed was the central church Augustinian doctrine of biblical inerrancy: “Listen, dear Erasmus: do you suppose any Christian will patiently endure to be told that the evangelists in their Gospel made mistakes?”²⁵ From Eck’s point of view, no Christian would countenance Erasmus’s alleged avowal of the errancy of Scripture. Then, Eck cited his Patristic authority or warrant for this stance—none other than St. Augustine’s either-or teaching: “If the authority of Holy Scripture at this point is shaky, can any other passage be free from the suspicion of error? A conclusion drawn by St. Augustine from an elegant chain of reasoning.”²⁶

Please note what constituted an “error” for Eck—only one word substituted for another. Some critics of the doctrine of inerrancy have suggested that it was the Princetonians in the late nineteenth century who redefined the word *infallibility* by giving it a more demanding set of precisionist connotations for what constituted an error, a restriction not associated with earlier uses of the word *infallibility* in the history

²³Ibid.

²⁴Letter 769, from Johann Maier von Eck, February 2, 1518, in *The Correspondence of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 5.289.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 289–90.

of the church.²⁷ The debate between Eck and Erasmus would suggest otherwise. Eck, at least, believed the Bible's infallibility could be placed in jeopardy by one misplaced word—a very small linguistic bit.

Simon on Inerrancy

Our third witness attesting to the powerful influence of the Augustinian church doctrine about the inerrancy of Scripture is Richard Simon (1638–1712).²⁸ An Oratorian priest, Simon is often hailed as the “Father of Higher Criticism.” In the years spanned by Paul Hazard’s famous “Crisis of the European Mind” (1680–1715), Simon was probably the most erudite biblical expert in all Europe.²⁹ He had a profound knowledge of Rabbinics as well as the theology and liturgies of the Eastern churches, gained in part while he served as the librarian at the Oratorian Order’s House on Rue St. Honoré in Paris. He had read and cataloged precious manuscripts, both Western and Eastern. He became thoroughly familiar with the history of Bible translations and the worth of particular Bible commentaries. He had established principles of biblical interpretation. He drafted huge tomes in which he displayed uncommon knowledge of the history of exegesis and biblical versions.³⁰ For this reason, Simon’s testimony regarding the

²⁷See, e.g., George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 112–13: “The purpose of inspiration was to communicate a ‘record of truth.’ For such a record ‘accuracy of statement’ and an ‘infallible correctness of the report’ were essential. These would not be assured if the selection of words were left to humans, whose memories were faulty. Although the method of inspiration was not merely mechanical dictation, the Holy Spirit would guarantee the accuracy of the reports only by inspiring the authors to select correct words.” Professor Marsden proposes that the alleged influence of Common Sense Realism and Baconianism upon the thought of the Princetonians prompted them to emphasize the accuracy of the words of Holy Scripture.

²⁸Studies devoted to the life and thought of Richard Simon include Paul Auvray, *Richard Simon (1638–1712): Étude bio-bibliographique avec des textes inédits* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974); August Bernus, *Richard Simon et son Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969 [1869]); Jacques Le Brun and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Richard Simon: Additions aux Recherches curieuses sur la diversité des langues et religions d’Edward Breerewood* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983); Henri Margival, *Essai sur Richard Simon et la critique biblique au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Maillet, 1900); Jean Steinmann, *Richard Simon et les origines de l’exégèse biblique* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1960).

²⁹Paul Hazard, *The European Mind: The Critical Years 1680–1715* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990). In 1935, Hazard’s volume first appeared under the title *La crise de la conscience européenne*.

³⁰See, e.g., Simon, *Histoire critique des versions du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1690); Simon, *Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1693); Simon, *Nouvelles observations sur le texte et les versions du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Jean Boudot, 1695).

beliefs of Europeans at the dawn of the European “Enlightenment” is significant indeed.

On the very first page of his epochal *Critical History of the Old Testament*, Simon generalized about the current belief of Christians and Jews concerning the Bible’s infallibility in 1678:

One is not able to doubt that the truths contained in Holy Scripture are infallible and of a divine authority, since they come immediately from God, who in doing this used the ministry of men as his interpreters. Is there anyone, either Jew or Christian, who does not recognize that this Scripture being the pure Word of God, is at the same time the first principle and the foundation of Religion. But in that men have been the depositories of Sacred Books, as well as all other books, and that the first Originals [*les premiers Originaux*] had been lost; it was in some measure impossible that a number of changes occurred, due as much to the length of time passing, as to the negligence of copyists. It is for this reason St. Augustine recommends before all things to those who wish to study Scripture to apply themselves to the Criticism of the Bible and to correct the mistakes [*fautes*] of their copies. *Codicibus emendandis primitus debet invigilare solertia eorum, qui Scripturas Divinas nosse desiderant* [Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, bk. 2].³¹

Simon believed he was the first scholar to apply the French word *critique* to the study of Scripture.³²

In this passage, Richard Simon made the generalizing claim that all Jews and Christians in 1678 believed in the divine authority and infallibility of Scripture because it came from God. Simon recommended that critics needed to correct the mistakes in their copies because the *originaux* (originals) had been lost. What is more, Simon, Jesuit trained and quite anti-Augustinian, identified this program of “lower criticism” with none other than St. Augustine. Simon’s contemporary J. A. Bengel, as well as some Protestant orthodox scholars, likewise advocated “lower criticism.”³³ They used the Latin word *autographa* to identify biblical manuscripts that had perished and the word *apographa* for “original and authentic” extant texts in Greek

³¹Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1685), 1.

³²Auvray, *Richard Simon (1638–1712)*, 42.

³³Alan Thompson, “Pietist Critique of Inerrancy? J. A. Bengel’s *Gnomon* as a Test Case,” *JETS* 47 (2004): 71–88.

and Hebrew.³⁴ They viewed these latter texts as “infallible,” any errors being those of copyists.³⁵

Simon’s generalization that all Jews and Christians in 1678 believed in the infallibility of Scripture *before* the so-called Enlightenment began renders less persuasive the historiography that proposes that infallibility or inerrancy constituted Enlightenment doctrines, logical entailments of a rationalistic “enlightenment religion.”³⁶ In any case, we should perhaps exercise due care in using the English word *Enlightenment* if applying it to the eighteenth century. The English expression “Age of Enlightenment” did not come into parlance until the 1860s—although the word *enlightened* (Berkeley) did have some play in eighteenth-century speech.³⁷

Leo XIII on Inerrancy

Our fourth witness attesting to the existence of an Augustinian tradition regarding biblical inerrancy is Pope Leo XIII, a contemporary of A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield. The pope sought to give counsel to Roman Catholic professors of sacred Scripture of his day, especially at “Seminaries and Academical institutions,” regarding how they should study the Bible and interact with “higher criticism” and recent developments in science. The Rector of the Catholic Institute in Paris, Monseigneur d’Hulst, had written a piece (Jan. 25, 1893), in which he appeared open to limiting inspiration to matters of faith and practice.³⁸ In *Providentissimus Deus: Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the Study of Holy Scripture* (Nov. 18, 1893), Leo XIII indicated that the Roman Catholic Church affirmed that Holy Scripture is without error not only for matters of faith and practice but also for matters

³⁴Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 2:413.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 413–14.

³⁶See Marsden’s chapter, “Presbyterians and the Truth,” in *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 109–18. For incisive critiques of Marsden’s proposal, see Paul Helseth, “*Right Reason*” and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010); and David P. Smith’s forthcoming volume *B. B. Warfield’s Scientifically Constructive Theological Scholarship*.

³⁷*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 5:268: “1860 Froude Hist. Eng V. 3. He imagined that an age of enlightenment was at hand.”

³⁸Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus: Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the Study of Holy Scripture, November 18, 1893*, sec. 20. Concerning Monseigneur d’Hulst’s limitation on the extent of infallibility’s purview, see James Tunstead Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 220.

of history and science (a core entailment of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy). He chastised those who limited the inerrancy of Scripture to matters of faith and morals.

But it is absolutely wrong and forbidden, either to narrow inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture, or to admit that the sacred writer has erred. For the system of those who, in order to rid themselves of these difficulties, do not hesitate to concede that divine inspiration regards the things of faith and morals, and nothing beyond, because (as they wrongly think) in a question of the truth or falsehood of a passage, we should consider not so much what God has said as the reason and purpose which He had in mind in saying it—this system cannot be tolerated.³⁹

Concerning physical science, Pope Leo XIII wrote:

We have to contend against those who, making an evil use of physical science, minutely scrutinize the Sacred Book in order to detect the writers in a mistake, and to take occasion to vilify its contents. Attacks of this kind, bearing as they do on matters of sensible experience, are peculiarly dangerous to the masses, and also to the young who are beginning literary studies.⁴⁰

Leo XIII continued, “There can never, indeed, be any real discrepancy between the theologian and the physicist, as long as each confines himself with his own lines, and both are careful, as St. Augustine warns us.” He cited Augustine’s wise counsel:

Whatever they can really demonstrate to be true of physical nature, we must show to be capable of reconciliation with our Scriptures; and whatever they assert in their treatises which is contrary to these Scriptures of ours, that is to Catholic faith, we must either prove it as well as we can to be entirely false, or at all events we must, without the smallest hesitation, believe it to be so.⁴¹

Pope Leo XIII acknowledged that the Vulgate was the “authentic” version of the Roman Catholic Church per the Council of Trent. At the same time, he quoted St. Augustine’s counsel to the effect that the

³⁹Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, sec. 18.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

“examination of older tongues” and manuscripts will be useful and advantageous to clear up the possible “ambiguity and want of clearness” in the Vulgate.⁴²

Toward the end of his encyclical (sec. 21), Leo XIII summarized Catholic teaching regarding biblical inerrancy. He referred to a passage from Augustine we have already cited as the warrant for this church doctrine:

It follows that those who maintain that an error is possible in any genuine passage of the sacred writings, either pervert the Catholic notion of inspiration, or make God the author of such error. And so emphatically were all the Fathers and Doctors agreed that the divine writings, as left by the hagiographers, are free from all error, that they laboured earnestly, with no less skill than reverence, to reconcile with each other those numerous passages which seem at variance—the very passages which in great measure have been taken up by the higher criticism. . . . The words of St. Augustine to St. Jerome may sum up what they taught: “On my part I confess to your charity that it is only to those Books of Scripture which are now called canonical that I have learned to pay such honor and reverence as to believe most firmly that none of their writers has fallen into any error. And if in these Books I meet anything which seems contrary to truth, I shall not hesitate to conclude either that the text is faulty, or that the translator has not expressed the meaning of the passage, or that I myself do not understand.”⁴³

Please note that Pope Leo XIII believed that the Patristic fathers had wrestled with a number of the same problem passages that had caught the attention of “higher critics” in his own day. Leo XIII apparently entertained the perception that what he meant by saying Holy Scripture is without error corresponded to what the church fathers believed about the truthfulness of Scripture. He did not think he was living in a different paradigm (our term) than their own so that he could not understand the textual problems they addressed. Moreover, Leo XIII confirmed the premise that in the Roman Catholic Church, Augustine’s teaching about the Bible’s inerrancy was tantamount to a central church doctrine.

⁴²Ibid., sec. 13.

⁴³Ibid., sec. 21.

Please note, too, that the claims of Hodge and Warfield in 1881 about the infallibility of the original autographs as constituting a church doctrine appear much less lonesome and doctrinally innovative in the context of Leo XIII's encyclical (1893). And should we be wondering whether Leo borrowed his thoughts about Scripture from Hodge and Warfield, who wrote a decade before him, we can safely surmise that he did not. Rather, the pope was reiterating an Augustinian church doctrine about inerrancy.

More Recent Catholic Developments

In 1910, the papacy tried to rein in the teachings of so-called “Catholic modernists” (a term first used in 1905) by stipulating that all members of the clergy must swear an antimodernist oath.⁴⁴ Catholic “modernists” such as Alfred Loisy at the Catholic Institute in Paris had earlier attempted to make teachings of higher criticism and evolution more acceptable within the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁵ They denied the inerrancy of Scripture. The papacy categorically rejected the modernists' initiatives and continued to affirm the church doctrine of biblical inerrancy.⁴⁶

Some years later, Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) once again condemned the limited inerrancy position (that is, the exclusion of history and science from an inerrancy definition).⁴⁷ The pope wrote that when

some Catholic writers, in spite of this solemn definition of Catholic doctrine [at Trent], by which such divine authority is claimed for the “entire books with all their parts” as to secure freedom from any error whatsoever, ventured to restrict the truth of Sacred Scripture solely to matters of faith and morals, and to regard other matters, whether in the domain of physical science or history, as “obiter dicta” and—as they contended—in no wise connected with faith,

⁴⁴Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration*, 232.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu on Promoting Biblical Studies, Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Providentissimus Deus*.

⁴⁷Ibid., sec. 1. Citing Leo XIII and St. Augustine, Pius XII wrote: “Finally, it is absolutely wrong and forbidden either to narrow inspiration to certain passages of Holy Scripture, or to admit that the sacred writer has erred, since the divine inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error but excludes and rejects it absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the Supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. This is the ancient and constant faith of the Church” (sec. 3).

Our Predecessor of immortal memory, Leo XIII in the Encyclical Letter “Providentissimus Deus” . . . justly and rightly condemned these errors.⁴⁸

In the early 1960s, the drafters of the first edition of *Dei Verbum*, Vatican II’s statement regarding Holy Scripture, continued to affirm the doctrine of biblical inerrancy for matters of faith and practice and history and science.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in the final edition (Nov. 18, 1965) of *Dei Verbum* (the Constitution on Divine Revelation, art. 11), the Roman Catholic Church at Vatican II apparently broke with its own Augustinian definition of inerrancy and affirmed, “We must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to Sacred Scriptures.”⁵⁰

Thereafter, a number of Roman Catholic scholars began to identify the inerrancy position (including history and science) not with the longstanding Augustinian tradition of their church but, interestingly enough, with the viewpoint of Protestant fundamentalism and biblical literalism.⁵¹ For example, the Most Rev. Charles J. Chaput, the archbishop of Denver, in addressing the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (2000), entitled his keynote address “*Dei Verbum* 35 Years Later: Understanding the Word of God.” He declared:

Dei Verbum, therefore, offers a middle way between Protestant fundamentalism and secular rationalism in interpreting the Bible. It clearly teaches the divine inspiration of the sacred authors and therefore, the inerrant quality of their writings. It says “that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to be confided to the sacred Scriptures” (n. 11). In that qualifying phrase, “for the sake of our salvation,” we hear the Catholic response to modern rationalism,

⁴⁸Ibid., sec. 3.

⁴⁹The first draft indicated that “the entire sacred Scripture is absolutely immune from error.”

⁵⁰*Dei Verbum* (Nov. 18, 1965).

⁵¹Consult “Pastoral Statement for Catholics on Biblical Fundamentalism” (National Conference of Catholic Bishops Ad Hoc Committee on Biblical Fundamentalism, Archbishop John Whealon of Hartford, Connecticut, chair, Mar. 26, 1987), 1: “A further characteristic of biblical fundamentalism is that it tends to interpret the Bible as being always without error or as literally true in a way quite different from the Catholic Church’s teaching on the inerrancy of the Bible.”

which denies the inerrancy of Scripture and even the need for salvation. But *Dei Verbum* also avoids a simple-minded literalism.⁵²

On occasion, a few Roman Catholic scholars have dared to raise the objection that what some of their colleagues have disparaged as a fundamentalist view of Scripture actually represents what the Roman Catholic Church had essentially taught regarding Scripture from St. Augustine's day until the first draft of *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II.⁵³

Protestant Viewpoints: James Kugel

In the preceding segment of our reception-history sketch we have proposed, contra Professor Sandeen's perception of the history of biblical authority, that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy constituted a central Augustinian church doctrine for the Roman Catholic Church until Vatican II. Certainly, there were biblical scholars and theologians in the Roman Catholic communion such as Erasmus, Lessius, Isaac de La Peyrère, Henry Holden, Richard Simon, Lammenais, and the Catholic "modernist" Alfred Loisy who dissented from the doctrine in one way or another.⁵⁴ But they constituted a distinct minority within the clergy.

But did the Augustinian church doctrine of Scripture's inerrancy also constitute a commonly held church belief for Protestants in the West? To address this question, we will again pursue a reception-history sketch of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as it relates to Protestants.

Protestant Reformers from Martin Luther to Thomas Cranmer believed that the Christian church during the Patristic era and beyond, until 1200 or so, had remained basically orthodox and thus belonged

⁵²Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, Archbishop of Denver, "Dei Verbum 35 Years Later: Understanding the Word of God" (Scripture Conference 2000, US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Oct. 20, 2000).

⁵³Cf. Collin Hansen, "Rome's Battle for the Bible, Synod of Bishops Revisits Inerrancy Compromise Reached at Vatican II" (blog), *Christianity Today*, October 20, 2008. The working document *Instrumentum Laboris*, drawn up for the Roman Synod of Bishops that met in Rome (Oct. 2008), appeared to limit the purview of the Bible's inerrancy to matters of saving truth (excluding history and science). A number of conservative bishops expressed reservations about the early drafts of this document.

⁵⁴Cf. Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration*, 44–47 (Lessius), 59–60 (Henry Holden).

to them.⁵⁵ Cranmer, for example, postulated that the Catholic Church had upheld the true doctrine of the Lord's Supper until around AD 1000, but then the church's teaching was corrupted.⁵⁶ The Reformers believed they were recovering church doctrine, not inventing it. Our first witness is James L. Kugel, a specialist in the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation. His testimony provides further insights regarding the way in which the church fathers esteemed and revered Scripture. He helps us to understand that even if the church fathers did not treat the subject of inerrancy in a systematic fashion, they worked with the assumption of Scripture's inerrancy in doing their exegesis.

From 1982 to 2003, Professor Kugel, now living in Israel, served as the Starr Professor of Hebrew at Harvard. His class on the Bible attracted up to nine hundred students—one of the most popular classes at the university.

In his recent book *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture Then and Now*, Kugel argues that the church fathers believed Scripture is without error and engaged in harmonization efforts to demonstrate that such is the case.⁵⁷ Kugel writes, "It is a striking fact that all ancient interpreters seem to have shared very much the same set of expectations about the biblical text."⁵⁸ He continues,

We can gain a rather clear picture of what their authors were assuming about the biblical text—and what emerges is that, despite the geographic and cultural distance separating some of these interpreters from others, they all seem to have assumed the same four basic things about *how* the Bible was to be read.⁵⁹

Then Kugel outlines four assumptions held in common by ancient interpreters. According to the third assumption in his listing, the church fathers upheld the perfect truthfulness of Scripture. Assumption 3 reads: "Interpreters also assumed that the Bible contained no contradictions

⁵⁵Luther was especially critical of the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of transubstantiation. He believed it represented a doctrinal innovation based not on Scripture but particularly upon Aristotle's influence on the thinking of Thomas Aquinas and the Fourth Lateran Council.

⁵⁶Graham Cole, *Cranmer's Views on the Bible and the Christian Prince: An Examination of His Writings and the Edwardian Formularies* (ThM thesis, University of Sydney, 1983), 132.

⁵⁷James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 15.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

or mistakes. It is perfectly harmonious, despite its being an anthology. . . .”⁶⁰ Kugel further observes:

And of course the Bible ought not to contradict itself or even seem to repeat itself needlessly, so that if it said “and the two of them walked together” twice, the second occurrence cannot be merely repetitive; it must mean something different from the first. In short, the Bible, they felt, is an utterly consistent, seamless, perfect book.⁶¹

Now, Professor Kugel is by no means an advocate of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. His testimony, therefore, cannot be easily impugned as if it stems from a partisan spirit.

Luther, Calvin, and the Protestant Orthodox

On the eve of the Reformation, Johannes Eck, as we saw, claimed that “no Christian” would permit Erasmus to say that an actual error exists in Scripture. But did Martin Luther, Eck’s Protestant contemporary and sometime disputant, likewise believe in biblical inerrancy? Much ink has been spilled regarding this controversial topic.⁶²

Heimo Reinitzer, our second witness coming to the stand, may help us adjudicate the validity of competing interpretations of Luther’s views of biblical authority. In 1983, Dr. Reinitzer published *Biblia deutsch: Luthers Bibelübersetzung und ihre Tradition* in celebration of Luther’s five hundredth birthday.⁶³ In researching this book, Reinitzer, a historian, had studied the history of various editions of the Luther Bible (1534) and the Reformer’s views of scriptural authority and interpretation. Reinitzer ranks among the leading experts in the world regarding Luther’s view of biblical authority.⁶⁴

In the early 1980s, I was a research fellow at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany, about the same time Professor Reinitzer’s book was published under the library’s auspices. Reinitzer was likewise doing research at the library on occasion. I had the oppor-

⁶⁰Ibid., 15.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Mark D. Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand: The Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther’s Approach to Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006 [2004]), 47–53.

⁶³Heimo Reinitzer, *Biblia deutsch: Luthers Bibelübersetzung und ihre Tradition* (Wolfenbüttel: Herzog August Bibliothek, 1983).

⁶⁴Professor Dr. Heimo Reinitzer became in time the president of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Hamburg.

tunity of taking a few “coffee pauses” with him. The Germans love to talk over coffee, and Dr. Reinitzer, an Austrian by birth, was no exception.

Knowing that considerable controversy hovered over the issue of what Luther believed about Scripture, I asked Reinitzer what he thought Luther’s view of biblical authority might be. Did Luther believe in biblical inerrancy, for example? Reinitzer’s answer was straightforward: “Of course,” he replied. He then proceeded to give me an unsolicited brief history lesson regarding how the idea had gained such currency that Luther did not believe in biblical inerrancy. From his perspective, it was in particular neoorthodox historians and theologians who created and promoted this misleading historiography. They often argued that a disjunction existed between Luther’s view of biblical authority, with its christological focus, and views of later Lutherans called “Scholastics” or “Protestant Orthodox.”⁶⁵

Olivier Fatio of the University of Geneva has made the same case in reference to the existence of continuity of belief between John Calvin and the Reformed Orthodox. He and others, such as Jill Raitt, have specifically challenged the neoorthodox historiography of Ernst Bizer, who had claimed that Lambert Daneau was the first Reformed theologian to betray Calvin’s views by introducing a rationalistic approach to doing theology and by including the natural world under the purview of the Bible’s authority.⁶⁶

Interestingly enough, Richard Muller also argues in agreement with Reinitzer and Fatio that a continuity of thought about the Bible’s infallibility existed between Luther and Calvin and the Protestant orthodox

⁶⁵Jill Raitt, ed., *Shapers of Religious Tradition in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland, 1560–1600* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), xix. Karl Barth provided this controversial assessment of seventeenth-century Protestant orthodox theologians: “All too confidently the heroes of orthodoxy, in their justifiable attempt to adopt Early and Medieval church tradition, overloaded it with presuppositions which were bound sooner or later to jeopardize Reformed knowledge of God and of salvation” (Foreword to Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978], vi).

⁶⁶Ernst Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus*, Theologische Studien 71 (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1963). Olivier Fatio wrote, “Why, then, should scholars [Bizer, note 38] criticize the rational framework to which he [Daneau] resorted as a corruption of the existential discoveries of the Reform,” in *Shapers of Religious Tradition*, ed. Raitt, 111. Cf. Olivier Fatio, *Méthode et théologie: Lambert Daneau et les débuts de la scholastique réformée* (Genève: Droz, 1976). Ernst Bizer was a major proponent of a “neoorthodox” historiography. Other criticisms of a Barthian historiography regarding the Bible’s authority are found in David Gibson and Daniel Strange, eds., *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009).

of the seventeenth century. Muller adds the further point that Catholic theologians before the Reformation also upheld the same doctrine. In his encyclopedic study *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1720*, Muller writes:

In a similar vein, the frequently heard characterization of the orthodox view of Scripture that Protestantism rejected an infallible Roman pope only to replace him with an infallible “paper pope” is, at best, a catchily worded misunderstanding of the history of the doctrine of Scripture. On the one hand, it ignores the continuity of Christian doctrine on the point: catholic teaching before the Reformation assumed the infallibility of Scripture, as did the Reformers—the Protestant orthodox did not invent the concept. . . . The doctrine of the infallible authority of Scripture remained a constant while the framework of interpretation shifted away from a strong emphasis on churchly *magisterium* and tradition to an equally powerful emphasis on confessional norms and on a more closely defined tradition of interpretation. The central debate was not over the infallibility of Scripture—that was taken for granted by both sides—rather the debate was centered on the question of authority, specifically on the authority of interpretation.⁶⁷

William Whitaker

Professor Muller’s historical analysis is amply confirmed by one of the most significant polemical exchanges of the late sixteenth century, between the Protestant Cambridge professor William Whitaker and the renowned Roman Catholic theologian Robert Bellarmine.⁶⁸ In his *Disputation on Holy Scripture, against the Papists, especially Bellarmine and Stapleton* (1588), Whitaker indicated that Protestants upheld as church doctrine the inerrancy of Scripture:

But, say they [Roman Catholics], the church never errs; the pope never errs. We shall shew both assertions to be false in the proper place. We say that scripture never errs, and therefore judge that interpretation to be the truest which agrees with scripture. What have we to

⁶⁷Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:101.

⁶⁸Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, 471–73.

do with churches, or councils, or popes, unless they can show that what they define is in harmony with the scriptures?⁶⁹

Like Catholics before him, the Protestant Whitaker claimed Augustine's teaching on Scripture as one essential warrant for his belief in inerrancy:

We cannot but wholly disapprove the opinion of those who think that the sacred writers have, in some places fallen into mistakes. That some of the ancients were of this opinion appears from the testimony of Augustine, who maintains, in opposition to them, "that the evangelists are free from all falsehood, both from that which proceeds from deliberate deceit, and that which is the result of forgetfulness" (De Cons. Ev. Lib. II. C.12). Consequently, Jerome judged wrong, if he really judged, as Erasmus supposes, "that the evangelists might have fallen into an error of memory."⁷⁰

Like the Roman Catholic Eck, Whitaker specifically criticized Erasmus's concession that Matthew may have made a mistake. Wrote Whitaker, "But it does not become us to be so easy and indulgent as to concede that such a lapse could be incident to the sacred writers."⁷¹

In his *Critical History of the Old Testament* (1678), Richard Simon described Whitaker's *Disputation on Holy Scripture* as a "key" Protestant apologetic regarding biblical authority:

In addition, I have gone into more detail about the sentiments which Whitaker had of Bellarmine and other Jesuits, because that ought to serve as a key for understanding countless books which have been written thereafter by Protestants of France, England, and Germany against the books of Bellarmine.⁷²

According to Simon, numerous Protestant theologians in Europe had recourse to Whitaker's *Disputation on Holy Scripture* when they needed arguments to use in disputes with Roman Catholic polemicists.

⁶⁹William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*, trans. and ed. William Fitzgerald (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, n.d. [1588]), 476.

⁷⁰Ibid., 36–37.

⁷¹Ibid., 37.

⁷²Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, 472.

Simon was about the last major thinker in the West to ask, and not appear foolhardy, whether there is “anyone, either Jew or Christian, who does not recognize that this Scripture being the Word of God, is at the same time the first principle and the foundation of religion?” In other words, Simon indicated that as late as 1678, most self-identifying Christians and Jews affirmed, and I quote the priest, “The truths contained in Holy Scripture are infallible and of a divine authority, since they come immediately from God, who in doing this used the ministry of men as his interpreters.”

Inerrancy Questioned and Defended

But during Paul Hazard’s so-called “Crisis of the European Mind” (1680–1715), a good number of prominent participants in the Republic of Letters began to question the inerrancy position, as had some skeptics, deists, Socinians, and others before them.⁷³ These towering figures of European intellectual life included Pierre Bayle, Jean Le Clerc, and John Locke.⁷⁴ Already in the 1650s, Isaac de La Peyrère had proposed the pre-Adamite hypothesis, the view that there were pre-Adamites who lived before Adam and Eve. Evidence suggested that Greenland had possibly been inhabited fifty thousand years earlier.⁷⁵ This hypothesis challenged the calculations of numerous seventeenth-century biblical chronologists, whom Anthony Grafton of Princeton University is presently studying. James Ussher (1581–1656) was one of the most famous of the many chronologists.⁷⁶ Ussher had estimated the date of creation as 4004 BC. La Peyrère’s hypothesis was perceived by orthodox Catholics and Protestants as directly challenging traditional views of biblical infallibility and the plain teaching of Genesis. Hauled before the Roman Catholic Inquisition, La Peyrère recanted his view, blaming his former Calvinist background for having led him astray.⁷⁷

⁷³Hazard, *The European Mind*, 80–98.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 99–115 (Pierre Bayle), 239–51 (John Locke). For the thought of Pierre Bayle, see also the extensive writings of Elisabeth Labrousse.

⁷⁵Isaac de La Peyrère, *Prae-adamite* (1655); La Peyrère, *Relation de Groenland* (1647).

⁷⁶In his lecture “Biblical Chronology: Legend or Science?,” delivered at the Senate House, University of London, March 4, 1987, James Barr, a strong critic of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, acknowledged that scholars such as Martin Luther, Joseph Justus Scaliger, James Ussher, and Isaac Newton, who drew up biblical chronologies, shared a belief that Scripture was “divinely inspired and equally infallible in matters of normal human history, as well as in theological matters” (p. 4).

⁷⁷Richard Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676): His Life, Work and Influence* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 13.

Historian Richard Popkin has made a strong case that the La Peyrère affair, more than the Galileo controversy (Galileo indicated he believed in biblical infallibility), ignited an early round of the so-called war between science and religion.

Simon, a correspondent with La Peyrère, was likewise charged with overthrowing the doctrine of biblical infallibility—the very belief he had affirmed “all Christians and Jews” upheld. In the preface to the *Critical History of the Old Testament*, Simon proposed his controversial “public scribes hypothesis,” that is, that the republic of Israel had public scribes who kept Israel’s records.⁷⁸ These scribes, allegedly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and using Israel’s records, added emendations to the Pentateuch. In consequence, said Simon, Moses did not write all of the Pentateuch. So dangerous was Simon’s hypothesis thought to be that the French government, upon the urging of Bossuet, ordered the thirteen hundred copies of the first edition of Simon’s *Critical History of the Old Testament* burned. Simon’s Oratorian Order promptly expelled the priest.⁷⁹

Ironically enough, in the preface to his controversial work, Simon had indicated he hoped his “public scribes hypothesis” would help answer serious objections Spinoza had raised about the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670).⁸⁰ Some years later, Simon and the Remonstrant Jean Le Clerc locked horns in one of the most famous debates in European history (1685–1687), regarding the infallibility of Scripture and the authorship of the Pentateuch.⁸¹ In this heated contest, Le Clerc penned two books, and Simon three. The two scholars pursued their debate in French rather than Latin—the normal language of choice when discussing sensitive theological matters. In many regards, the Simon–Le Clerc debate represented a turning point in European intellectual history. It constituted the last significant debate followed by major European intellectuals still seriously reflecting upon claims for the Bible’s infallibility. In the

⁷⁸Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, preface.

⁷⁹Auvray, *Richard Simon (1638–1712)*, 45–53.

⁸⁰Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* (New York: Dover, 1951). Regarding Richard Simon’s assessment of Spinoza’s views of Scripture, see John D. Woodbridge, “Richard Simon’s Reaction to Spinoza’s ‘Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,’” in *Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung*, ed. Karlfried Gründer and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggeman (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1984), 201–26.

⁸¹John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 95–99.

mid-eighteenth century, scholars ranging from the biblical critic Jean Astruc to the *philosophe* Diderot, editor of the *Encyclopedia*, cited the Simon–Le Clerc debate as a very significant controversy over the Bible’s authority.⁸² For that matter, Johann Salomo Semler, the so-called “Father of Higher Criticism” in Halle, Germany, wrote in his diary that it was after reading the works of Simon and Le Clerc that he felt constrained to rethink his views of the Bible’s authority.⁸³ Semler had been raised among German Pietists, many of whom not only had upheld the inerrancy of Scripture but, like his colleague John David Michaelis at the University of Halle, had even defended the infallibility of the Masoretic pointing (1739).⁸⁴

In the 1720s, a good number of Pietist pastors and professors at Halle had likewise defended both the infallibility of the “vulgar text” and the infallibility of the Masoretic pointing. In the *Allgemeine Bibliothek*, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, a renowned biblical critic, wrote:

A Bible with various readings had been printed at Halle, in the year 1720, and notwithstanding the use of the whole noble apparatus, they adhered still pertinaciously to the infallibility of the vulgar text. . . . They had discovered upon investigation, and exposed to view in this edition of the Bible, the contradictions of the Masora—the most satisfactory evidence of their fallibility: and yet they had sworn, in as solemn a manner, to the absolute infallibility of the same, as they had sworn to their symbolical articles.⁸⁵

The influential view that German Pietists generally did not embrace biblical inerrancy needs reexamination. In Lausanne, some Protestants fought it out in the streets over the Masoretic pointing, some in favor of the belief in its infallibility, others opposed.⁸⁶

⁸²Jean Astruc, *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paroît que Moïse s’est servi pour composer le Livre de la Genèse* (Paris: 1753), 7, 9, 454, 476–77.

⁸³John D. Woodbridge, “German Responses to the Biblical Critic Richard Simon: From Leibniz to J. S. Semler,” in *Historische Kritik und biblischer Kanon in der deutschen Aufklärung*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow, Walter Sparr, and John Woodbridge (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988), 80.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁵“An Account of the Life and Writings of John David Michaelis from Eichhorn’s *Allgemeine Bibliothek*,” *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 2 (1826): 261.

⁸⁶Barthélemy Barnaud, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des troubles arrivés en Suisse à l’occasion du Consensus* (Amsterdam: J. Frédéric Barnard, 1727). The influential claims of Professor Donald Dayton that German Pietists did not countenance the doctrine of biblical inerrancy appear

Coleridge, Sabatier, and Huxley

The testimony of our next witness, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the famous English man of letters, will help us understand what were the beliefs of English Protestants not many decades before A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield penned their 1881 article “Inspiration.” In his posthumous *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (1841), Coleridge, who was intent upon overthrowing belief in the Bible’s infallibility, quoted a skeptic’s claim to the effect that most English Protestants, whether Methodist, Calvinist, Quaker, or other, believed in biblical infallibility:

I have frequently attended meetings of the British and Foreign Bible Society, where I have heard speakers of every denomination, Calvinist and Arminian, Quaker and Methodist, Dissenting Ministers and Clergymen, nay dignitaries of the Established Church—and still have I heard the same doctrine,—that the Bible was not to be regarded or reasoned about in the way that other good books are or may be. . . . What is more, their principal arguments were grounded on the position that the Bible throughout was dictated by Omniscience, and therefore in all its parts infallibly true and obligatory, and that the men, whose names are prefixed to the several books or chapters, were in fact but as different pens in the hand of one and the same Writer, and the words the words of God himself.⁸⁷

Coleridge responded, “What could I reply to this?—I could neither deny the fact, nor evade the conclusion—namely, that such is at present the popular belief.”⁸⁸ According to Coleridge, a commitment to the Bible’s infallibility remained an important church doctrine for most English Protestants until at least the 1830s.

Another pertinent witness is Louis Auguste Sabatier (1839–1901), one of Protestant liberalism’s brilliant stars.⁸⁹ He helped establish the Protestant Faculty of Theology in Paris and served as the school’s dean. His testimony will help us understand that despite the impact of the *siècle des Lumières* (Enlightenment) of the eighteenth century upon French culture, many French and Swiss Protestants in the nineteenth

less persuasive in light of Eichhorn’s observation. Certainly some German Pietists upheld the infallibility not only of the vulgar text but also of the Masora.

⁸⁷Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (Boston: James Monroe and Company, 1841), 79–80.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 81.

⁸⁹Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution: 1789 to the Present* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1971), 183.

century remained committed to the doctrine of the Bible's infallibility as late as the 1840s. A harsh critic of the doctrine, Sabatier in his posthumous *The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit* (1901) indicated that "Richard Simon, Jean Le Clerc, Lessing, Semler, and the German theologians of the nineteenth century" had sharply attacked the doctrine.⁹⁰ Sabatier averred that the "Final Crisis" for the doctrine in the French Protestant world took place between 1848 and 1860, precipitated in part when Professor Edmond Scherer of the Oratoire Theological School of Geneva resigned his position in 1849, no longer able to subscribe to the evangelical school's doctrine in good conscience.⁹¹

Professor Sabatier observed that some theologians in his own day (1870s to 1890s), unable to maintain "the absolute character of the infallibility of the bible, without which infallibility does not exist," were attempting to defend "a sort of indefinite and limited infallibility, a fallible infallibility which it is simply impossible to define." Their tactical efforts, he thought, were doomed to fail.⁹²

Our final witness is Thomas Huxley (1825–1895), Darwin's well-known defender. Huxley argued that the most important intellectual trait of his day was the emergence of the authority of "natural knowledge" as a replacement for the authority of "revealed knowledge." He indicated that in 1869 he had "invented the word 'Agnostic' to denote people who, like myself, confess themselves to be hopelessly ignorant concerning a variety of matters about which metaphysicians and theologians, both orthodox and heterodox, dogmatise with utmost confidence." In 1893, Huxley, like Coleridge before him, acknowledged that the vast majority of the English people had believed in biblical infallibility in earlier decades:

The doctrine of biblical infallibility was widely held by my countrymen within my recollection: I have reason to think many persons of unimpeachable piety, a few of learning, and even some of intelligence, yet uphold it. But I venture to entertain a doubt whether it can produce any champion whose competency and authority would

⁹⁰Louis Auguste Sabatier, *The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit* (New York: McClure, Phillips & Company, 1904), 220.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 218–19.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 223.

be recognized beyond the limits of the sect, or theological coterie, to which he belongs.

Huxley noticed that, much like in Sabatier's France of the 1890s, an apologetic effort was underway in England devoted

to the end of keeping the name of "Inspiration" to suggest the divine source, and consequently infallibility, of more or less of the biblical literature, while carefully emptying the term of any definite sense. For "plenary inspiration" we are asked to substitute a sort of "inspiration with limited liability," the limit being susceptible of indefinite fluctuation in correspondence with the demands of scientific criticism.⁹³

Like Sabatier, Huxley believed this stratagem would fail.

Reflections: Evangelical Self-Identity and the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy

The doctrine of biblical inerrancy is no late imaginative creation of A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield in 1881 or of twentieth-century American fundamentalism. Rather, it is an essential evangelical belief based upon a biblical warrant. It resides squarely within the Augustinian tradition regarding the Bible's truthfulness. Both Roman Catholics and the Protestant Reformers affirmed the church doctrine.

Little wonder, then, that Hodge and Warfield, fully aware of the doctrine's historical provenance in the ante-Nicene Fathers, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism, described it as the "great Catholic doctrine of Biblical Inspiration, i.e., that the Scriptures not only contain, but *are the Word of God*, and hence that all their elements and all their affirmations: are absolutely errorless, and binding the faith and obedience of men."⁹⁴ They called their view a church doctrine and observed:

It is not questionable that the great historic churches have held these creed definitions in the sense of affirming the errorless infallibility of the Word. This is everywhere shown by the way in which all the great bodies of Protestant theologians have handled Scripture in their commentaries, systems of theology, catechisms and sermons. And this

⁹³Cited in John C. Greene, "Darwin and Religion," in *European Intellectual History since Darwin and Marx*, ed. W. Warren Wagar (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 15–16.

⁹⁴Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 26–27.

has always been pre-eminently characteristic of epochs and agents of reformation and revival. All the great world-moving men, as Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, Whitefield and Chalmers, and proportionately those most like them, have so handled the Divine Word.⁹⁵

Among the confessions upholding “errorless infallibility,” they cited the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, the Westminster Confession, and the Second Helvetic Confession.⁹⁶ Our reception histories lend credence to their claims.

By contrast, Ernest Sandeen’s perception of the history of biblical inerrancy may stand in need of substantial revision. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy was not being created. Rather, as we saw, European Catholic modernists and Protestants such as the ones Sabatier and Huxley referenced were attempting to modify or jettison the doctrine. What’s more, historian Clinton Ohlers has studied a number of American Protestant scholars who abandoned the doctrine of inerrancy at the turn of the twentieth century. It was often their perception that they were abandoning the old orthodox Protestant view of Scripture.⁹⁷ In addition, many used the words *infallibility* and *inerrancy* interchangeably. For example, Charles W. Pearson (1846–1905), an English literature professor at Northwestern University, whose attacks on biblical inerrancy in 1902 received extensive newspaper coverage, did just that. The president of Northwestern University asked him to step down from his post.⁹⁸

As for the doctrine of infallibility in the original autographs, it was a common piece of theological furniture among nineteenth-century evangelical theologians, as historian Randall Balmer demonstrated in

⁹⁵Ibid., 33.

⁹⁶Ibid., 32–33.

⁹⁷Clinton Ohlers, *The Roots of Inerrancy: A Comparison of Late Twentieth-century Anglo-American Protestant Perceptions of the Origins of the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy with Those of the Late 1800s* (MA thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1997).

⁹⁸Professor Pearson’s resignation was portrayed as voluntary in the newspapers. “Chicago: Feb. 12. Prof. Charles W. Pearson, whose recent utterances against the infallibility of certain portions of the Bible occasioned wide comment in the Methodist Episcopal Church circles, resigned today the professorship of English literature in the Northwestern University. The resignation, it is stated, was voluntary” (*The New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1902). The president of Northwestern had indicated to Professor Pearson that his stepping down would be salutary for the university. Professor Pearson had published an article “Open Inspiration versus a Closed Canon and Infallible Bible” (Northwestern University Archives, Evanston, IL; Description of Charles W. Pearson Family Papers, 1843–1968).

his master's thesis.⁹⁹ At Princeton Seminary itself, Charles Hodge, a predecessor of Warfield and editor of the *Biblical Repertory*, placed an article in the journal by German professor C. Beck in 1825. Beck clearly made a distinction between lost original autographs and extant copies of Scripture. He wrote, "The autographs appear to have perished early, and the copies which were taken, became more or less subject to those errors, which arise from the mistakes of transcribers, the false corrections of commentators and critics, from marginal notes, and from other sources."¹⁰⁰

A. A. Hodge and Warfield were by no means theologically innovative in speaking about original autographs in their 1881 "Inspiration" article. Rather, they were reiterating a common assumption of lower biblical criticism that Richard Simon and others had articulated and associated with Augustine's program for correcting errors in extant copies of Scripture. Hodge and Warfield put the matter this way: Scripture is without error "when the *ipsissima verba* [very words] of the original autographs are ascertained and interpreted in their natural and intended sense."¹⁰¹ The original autographs could be discerned through careful textual work. They are not "useless" as Sandeen had posited.

Before 1881, countless Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants believed the Bible was infallible not only for matters of faith and practice but also for history and science. Augustine's teaching in this regard was tantamount to an essential church doctrine for many Roman Catholics and Protestants. Some claimed this belief flowed directly from the premise that God, the author of truth, is also the ultimate author of Holy Scripture. Thus Scripture is without error. Many believed the doctrine served as a strong guardrail against the possibility of slipping or plunging into heterodoxy or worse. Many assumed it was a non-negotiable belief of their evangelical theological identity.

Billy Graham and Carl F. H. Henry

Certainly two of America's leading post-World War II evangelicals, Billy Graham and Carl F. H. Henry, understood the doctrine's importance and its value as an essential guardrail. Just before Graham's

⁹⁹Randall H. Balmer, *The Old Princeton Doctrine of Inspiration in the Context of Nineteenth-century Theology: A Reappraisal* (MA thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1981).

¹⁰⁰Beck, "Monogrammata Hermeneutics N. T.," *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 1 (1825): 27.

¹⁰¹Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 28.

famous Los Angeles Crusade in 1949, he experienced doubts about the Bible's authority and truthfulness. Chuck Templeton, who had been one of Youth for Christ's most talented fellow evangelists, had apparently indicated that Billy would never amount to much given his conservative views on Scripture. Chuck was overheard to have said, "Poor Billy, I feel sorry for him. He and I are taking two different roads." And indeed they did. Templeton ended up an agnostic, saying with tears in his eyes not long before his death, "I miss Jesus."

Graham was seriously affected by Templeton's criticisms of the Bible. In the very first fascicle of *Christianity Today* (1956), Graham wrote a remarkable article entitled "Biblical Authority in Evangelism"—a piece well worth reading even today. In the article (and in his autobiography, *Just As I Am*), he described how one evening, troubled by his doubts about scriptural authority, he went out into the woods near Forest Home camp up in the mountains around Los Angeles. Graham placed his open Bible on a stump and he prayed.

The exact wording of my prayer is beyond recall, but it must have echoed my thoughts: "O God! There are many things in this book I do not understand. . . . I can't answer some of the philosophical and psychological questions Chuck and others are raising."

I was trying to be on the level with God, but something remained unspoken. At last the Holy Spirit freed me to say it: "Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by *faith!*" . . .

I sensed the presence and power of God as I had not sensed it in months. Not all my questions were answered, but a major bridge had been crossed. In my heart and mind, I knew a spiritual battle in my soul had been fought and won.¹⁰²

Graham then indicated that this renewed commitment to the authority of Scripture constituted *the* "secret" of his ministry. He reminds us that God's Holy Word has great power to transform people's lives. We can sometimes study Scripture in an academic fashion and, paradoxically enough, lose our sense of its power as the very Word of God.

Graham recounted what he experienced once he began to depend on the power of God's authoritative Word in preaching:

¹⁰²Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (San Francisco: Harper-SanFrancisco, 1997), 139.

The people were not coming to hear great oratory, nor were they interested merely in my ideas. I found they were desperately hungry to hear what God had to say through His Holy Word. I felt as though I had a rapier in my hand, and through the power of the Bible was slashing deeply into men's consciences, leading them to surrender to God. Does not the Bible say of itself, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of souls and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12)? I found that the Bible became a flame in my hands. That flame melted away unbelief in the hearts of people and moved them to decide for Christ. The Word became a hammer breaking up stony hearts and shaping them into the likeness of God. Did not God say, "I will make my words in thy mouth fire" (Jer. 5:14) and "is not my word like as a fire? . . . and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jer. 23:29)?¹⁰³

For Billy Graham, biblical authority and evangelism became beautifully wedded together. You may have noticed that in his messages, Dr. Graham repeatedly declared, "The Bible says." And during the last sixty plus years, millions of people throughout the world responded to Graham's gospel message and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

And finally, Carl F. H. Henry, one of the prime movers in the evangelical resurgence after World War II, wrote an elegant piece in 1991, in which he too encouraged evangelical Christians to uphold a high view of biblical authority. Dr. Henry reminds us that we do not serve any Christ but the Christ according to Holy Scripture.

In a moving fashion, Henry helps us to understand better the nature of our evangelical self-identity as it relates to the gospel, to the authority of Holy Scripture, and to Christ. Henry entitled his valedictory piece "If I Had to Do It Again." He wrote:

From the outset of my Christian walk I have treasured the Book that speaks of the God of ultimate beginnings and ends, and illumines all that falls between. . . . An evangelical Christian believes incomparable good news: that Christ died in the stead of sinners and arose the third day as living head of the church of the twice-born, the people of God, whose mission is mandated by the scripturally given Word of God. The term evangelical—whose core is the "evangel"—therefore embraces the best of all good tidings, that on the ground of the sub-

¹⁰³Billy Graham, "Biblical Authority in Evangelism," *Christianity Today* 1, no. 1 (1956): 5–6.

stitutionary death of Christ Jesus, God forgives penitent sinners and he shelters their eternal destiny by the Risen Lord who triumphed over death and over all that would have destroyed him and his cause. That good news as the Apostle Paul makes clear, is validated and verified by the sacred Scriptures. Those who contrast the authority of Christ with the authority of Scripture do so at high risk. Scripture gives us the authentic teaching of Jesus and Jesus exhorted his apostles to approach Scripture as divinely authoritative. There is no confident road into the future for any theological cause that provides a fragmented Scriptural authority and—in consequence—an unstable Christology. Founded by the true and living Lord, and armed with the truthfulness of Scripture, the church of God is invincible. Whatever I might want to change in this pilgrim life, it would surely not be any of these high and holy commitments.¹⁰⁴

Dr. Henry had given these valedictory remarks about evangelical self-identity only a few years before I encountered him walking on the sidewalk at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the early 1990s. After our brief conversation, Henry continued to shuffle along the way to his next appointment. I wish I had spoken to him about the patent weaknesses of the new historiography that portrayed biblical inerrancy not as an evangelical church doctrine but solely as a fundamentalist doctrinal innovation. But I did not do so. Hopefully, as he walked to his next appointment, he was comforted by remembering his own description of evangelical self-identity and his own “high and holy” commitments regarding Christ and Holy Scripture. After all, they had biblical warrant and resided squarely in the central teachings of the Western churches from the Patristic era through the Protestant Reformation until the late twentieth century. They remain some of the salient theological elements that make up a consistent evangelical self-identity in the early twenty-first century.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 392–93.

¹⁰⁵For theological elements of evangelical self-identity, see the historic Christian creeds and more recently Kenneth Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, eds., *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). Evangelicals have differed among themselves regarding how the believer comes to an understanding that Scripture is God’s revealed written Word (witness of the Holy Spirit, historical evidence for its authority, the resurrected Christ’s authority, etc.). For more sociologically oriented descriptions of evangelical self-identity, consult the insightful writings of Christian Smith and D. Michael Lindsay, among others.