

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION AND THE FORMATION OF THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

Introduction

For centuries, theologians from different persuasions have wrestled with the issues of biblical inspiration. The connection between what God revealed and how the human writers committed this revelation to paper and its subsequent development into canonical Scripture inspired a complex debate among Christians for many centuries past. The need to know to what extent and on what basis the Bible is to be regarded as an authoritative document has resulted in a diversity of opinions on the meaning of biblical inspiration. Thus, various views on the history of the doctrine of inspiration will be considered. The development of the canon of Scripture will also be discussed as we attempt to show the authority of divine revelation.

Theology being a process, in that it continues to develop over the years, the current controversies over the Bible are not unique to our era. These controversies over the Bible simply reveal our attempts to come to

grips with modernity and the theological issues of our society. However, the controversies over the doctrine of biblical inspiration have not always been as complex as they are now, or perhaps not as intensified as they are today.

This chapter on the historical development of biblical inspiration will do at least two things for this dissertation: (1) It will help provide the important background for the analysis and evaluation of James Barr's view of biblical inspiration as well as the exposition of the view suggested in this study; and (2) It will contribute towards placing this study in a wider scope of theological trends in the area of biblical inspiration.

First, this chapter discusses the various theological alternatives (evangelical and non-evangelical) which have been presented by different people groups in their attempt to address the issues of biblical inspiration and biblical authority. A brief history of each of the seven different theological developments, namely, *Roman Catholic Scholasticism*, *Protestant Liberalism*, *Neo-orthodox Theology*, *Vatican II Catholicism*, *Liberal Evangelicals*, *Protestant Fundamentalism*, and *Church Fathers and Reformers*, are presented.¹

Second, the history of the evangelical development of the biblical doctrine of inspiration will be discussed briefly. Yes, I embrace the evangelical view of the Bible. I also affirm the complete reliability of the Bible as the criterion for the Christian's beliefs and conduct in this day

¹ Bruce Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis. *Integrative Theology*, Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987, pp.131-38. In this chapter, the two authors deal with the fundamental issues, in various theological camps, pertaining to biblical inspiration.

and age. In the course of this study I hope to explain why I take this position.

1. The Roman Catholic Scholasticism: Historically, the Roman Catholic theology has adhered to the principle of the divine origin and inerrancy of the Bible. Hardon explains biblical inspiration as:

The special influence of the Holy Spirit on the writers of Sacred Scripture in virtue of which God himself becomes the principal author of the books written and the sacred writer is the subordinate author. In using human beings as his instruments in the composition, God does so in harmony with the person's nature and temperament, and with no violence to the free, natural activity of his or her human faculties. According to the Church's teaching, "by supernatural power, God so moved and impelled them to write, He was so present to them, that the things which He ordered and those only they first rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth" (Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, Denzinger 3293).²

This view of the Scriptures dates back to the Council of Trent in 1546 when the Vulgate was declared to be authentic:

According to Pius XII, "the Vulgate, as the Church has understood and does now understand, is free from all error in matters of faith and morals. Consequently, as the Church herself testifies, it can be safely quoted, without the least fear of erring, in disputations, public readings, and sermons. Its *authenticity* should not be called *critical*, but *juridical*. The authority the Vulgate enjoys in doctrinal matters does not by any means proscribe—and in modern times it fairly demands—that this same doctrine be corroborated by the original texts. Nor does it mean that the original texts cannot be continually used to help clarify and explain more and more of the proper meaning of Sacred Scripture. Nor does the decree of Council of Trent forbid that translations be

² John A. Hardon, SJ *Pocket Catholic Dictionary - Abridged Edition of Modern Catholic Dictionary*. New York: Image Books / Doubleday, 1980, 198.

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made into the vernacular so that the faithful may use them and profit by them and understand more readily the meaning of the divine message. These translations may be made from the original texts” (Denzinger 3825).³

Commenting on the concepts around which the theology of biblical inspiration has developed, Vawter, a Catholic theologian, observes:

The technical term *par excellence* in the later theology of Biblical inspiration has been borrowed from 2 Tim 3.16, whose author designated ‘all Scripture’ or perhaps better, ‘every scriptural passage’ (B F" (D" NZ) as 2, ` B<, LFJ@H) a term which the Old Latin, followed by the Vulg, correctly rendered *divinitus inspirata*, that is, ‘divinely inspired’ or ‘breathed-by-God.’ In the intended historical context of the epistle, the ‘sacred writings’ (\, D (DVμμ" J") to which reference is made (v.15) are, of course, expressly the books of the OT canon that the early Church had accepted as its own Scriptures, ‘which can instruct unto the salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.’ However, we can probably agree with those commentators who contend that the author would also have had in his purview those writings of the apostolic Church that were already being equated with the Biblical canon: in 1 Tim 5.18 the author cites as Scripture alongside an OT passage what is apparently a *logion* of Jesus, a Q-saying now found in Mt 10.10 and Lk 10.7.⁴

Moreover, even some of the early Roman Catholic scholars like Thomas Aquinas who conceded that there were no errors to the inspired writers even insisted that “the author of Holy Writ is God.”⁵ He concluded that

³ Ibid., 47-48.

⁴ Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*. London/Philadelphia: Hutchinson/Westminster, 1972, 8.

⁵ Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*. Westchester: Crossway, 1981, 4. See also Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, 52-56. For Aquinas, the prophet as God’s mouthpiece, was protected by the Holy Spirit from error. The same would be true of the inspired authors of the Scriptures.

“It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatever is contained either in the Gospels or in any canonical Scripture.”⁶

However, although such a high view of the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures was held, practically, the authority of the Scriptures was neutralized, if not undermined. No wonder people like Martin Luther protested against the falsification and interpretation of Scripture only by the hierarchy. Luther concluded that the Romanists “treat the Scriptures and make them what they like, as if they were a nose of wax, to be pulled about at will.”⁷ So we see that even in those early days of doing theology, there was a recognition of the complexity of the doctrine of biblical inspiration. The concept of papal and episcopal infallibility and canon laws complicated this doctrine further, especially as the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy saw itself as being above the Scriptures. The First Vatican Council concluded:

The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks ex cathedra—that is, when in discharge of the office of pastor and teacher of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, by the divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals; and therefore such definitions are irreformable of themselves, and not in virtue of consent of the Church (Denzinger 3074).

Episcopal infallibility: Preservation from error of the bishops of the Catholic Church. They are infallible when all the bishops are assembled in a general council or, scattered

⁶ Bruce A. Demarest, “*Systematic Theology*,” *EDT*, 1064-66; George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, 25-26; David Wells, *The Search for Salvation*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978, 23-28, 36-46; Klaus Bockmuhl, “The Task of Systematic Theology,” ed. Kenneth Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry, *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979, 3-14.

⁷ Cited by Philip Watson, *Let God Be God!* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1947, 12.

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over the earth, they propose a teaching of faith or morals as one to be held by all the faithful. They are assured freedom from error provided they are in union with the Bishop of Rome and their teaching is subject to his authority. The scope of this infallibility, like that of the Pope, includes not only revealed truths but any teaching, even historical facts, principles of philosophy, or norms of the natural law that are in any way connected with divine revelation.⁸

This resulted in the equal veneration or reverence for the Scriptures and tradition. Consequently, the Apocryphal books, once regarded as lacking genuineness and canonicity, were declared inspired by God and thus making them part of the canonical books of Holy Scripture.⁹

2. Protestant Liberalism: The concept of a supernatural revelation has always bothered this camp. Hence, they have always attempted to either undermine or reject completely the notion of the Bible as a sacred document. People the likes of Horace Bushnell, a western liberal, refuted the doctrine of verbal inspiration and infallibility of Scripture as something involving “insuperable difficulties.”¹⁰ Part of the difficulties with the notion of accepting the doctrine of biblical inspiration was coming out of the deistic view of Scripture.¹¹

Furthermore, the formation and canonization of Scripture was

⁸ Hardon, S.J. *Catholic Dictionary*, 194 & 195.

⁹ Ibid., 24. See also Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, 59 and Demarest and Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 132.

¹⁰ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3 volumes. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983-85, 1:21.

¹¹ Demarest and Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 132. The deistic view of Scripture saw Scripture as a purely human book with obscurities, lots of contradictions, and many immoral regulations. Their understanding of biblical inspiration was such that “the biblical writers were inspired only to the extent that their talents were elevated in moments of special creativity.” 132.

questioned and undermined. Bushnell and others believed that God had inspired the biblical writers in the same way that any person is inspired to do any work.¹² With such an understanding of biblical inspiration, there is no recognition of a completed canon of Scripture. In fact, this idea of biblical inspiration is one that “will continue until the church ushers in the kingdom of God.”¹³ In a word, this view regards biblical inspiration as an on-going process. This is also a very fluid definition of biblical inspiration. Actually, this is the same view that sees the Bible as merely a collection of religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity. James Barr, as a representative of Protestant liberalism takes the same position when he defines biblical inspiration as follows:

Inspiration is not the inspiration of books, but the inspiration of the people from whom the books came. Is inspiration then a special event, an influence or relationship, which once existed but no longer exists? I think not. The relationship through which God is with his people in his Spirit in the formation of their life and tradition is not essentially different in kind from the mode in which he is with his people today.¹⁴

Indeed, for the Protestant liberalism, biblical inspiration is really a constant that goes throughout history. Therefore, Demarest is probably correct when he says of Barr:

By inspiration Barr means that God was with his people in the formation of their

¹² Ibid., 133.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980, 125.

religious traditions. Since the biblical writers played a pioneering role in the formation of Judeo-Christian traditions, one may call them “inspired” in some special sense. So defined, inspiration has nothing to do with inerrancy and final authority. Indeed, Barr insists that the early church concept of inspired and authoritative Scripture was a gross mistake: it was “the clearest demonstration of the presence of original sin in the early church.”¹⁵

Barr’s view of biblical inspiration will be discussed in greater detail in the coming chapters. Suffice to say, at this point, that this theological camp sees the Bible as simply a collection of Hebrew literature, containing the history of the evolutionary development of the religion of Israel. The Bible’s authority or value for us lies in the insights on religious experience recorded therein. As far as the significance of the human authors God used to write the Scriptures, these are, basically, men and women who found God, and here (as recorded in the Bible) is how they found him.

3. Neo-orthodox Theology: This was a theological movement that started in the “crisis associated with the disillusionment following World War I, with a rejection of Protestant scholasticism, with a denial of the Protestant liberal movement which had stressed accommodation of Christianity to Western science and culture, the immanence of God, and the progressive improvement of mankind.”¹⁶ The fundamental beliefs of neo-orthodox theology, especially regarding the doctrine of Holy Scripture, asserted ‘Scripture as a witness to divine revelation, and

¹⁵ Demarest and Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 133. See also Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1:78.

¹⁶ Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids:

Scripture as the Word of God.’ This view of Scripture makes a distinction between the Bible and revelation. Karl Barth was an early proponent of this movement which regarded Scripture as a witness to divine revelation:

A witness is not absolutely identical with that to which it witnesses. This corresponds with the facts upon which the truth of the whole proposition is based. In the Bible we meet with human words written in human speech, and in these words, and therefore by means of them, we hear of the lordship of the Triune God. Therefore when we have to do with the Bible, we have to do primarily with this means, with these words, with the witness, which as such is not itself revelation, but only -- and this is the limitation -- the witness to it.¹⁷

Basically, neo-orthodox views the Bible as a witness to the Word of God, a time bound document, confined to a cultural environment of past revelations and encounters with God. Since the precise details of how the biblical writers composed the Scriptures “is and inexplicable mystery,”¹⁸ Barth concludes that “one should not make the mistake of equating Scripture with the Word of God.”¹⁹ According to Barth, “the Bible, seen as inspired, unique, to be taken with great seriousness, is not to be confused with the Word. It is a human document and becomes the

Baker Book House, 754.

¹⁷ Cited by Klaas Runia, *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962, 18. See also p.21, “There is, therefore, *no direct identity* between the Bible and Revelation. We have no right to presuppose or to anticipate such an identification. It is something that must be *brought about*, through an act of God.”

¹⁸ Demarest and Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 133.

¹⁹ Ibid. Cited by Demarest and Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 133.

Word only as the Holy Spirit testifies to it.”²⁰ Furthermore, since “Scripture has authority only as it witnesses to the Word, then it has no authority in and of itself.”²¹

The neo-orthodox view of biblical inspiration could be summed up as follows: The Bible is a purely human book containing some errors as to facts and some false doctrines; but it is, nevertheless, in God’s grace the instrument of the Holy Spirit which rightly interpreted as a whole leads to the truth, that is, the divine Christ. Even what is not true still conveys the truth since the whole Scripture, in every word of it, is the final authority for theology.

The long and short of this view of the Bible, it appears, undermines the authority of the Bible as the objective and reliable Word of God.

4. Vatican II Catholicism: This view of the Scriptures, heavily influenced by the Protestant neo-orthodox theology, basically restricts the truthfulness and authority of Scripture to the ones that relate to the doctrine of salvation.²² The Vatican II Catholic view of divine inspiration is put forth as follows:

The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For Holy

²⁰ Elwell, ed. “Karl Barth” in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 127.

²¹ Ibid. See also Runia, *Barth’s Doctrine of Holy Scripture*, 22. “The Bible, therefore, must time and again *become* the Word of God. Barth likes to compare it with the water of the pool of Bethesda (John 5). This water had no healing power in itself, but only when it was moved from on high. Nobody had control over this event. And this same “from time to time” holds true of the Bible.”

²² Demarest and Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 134.

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Mother Church relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 3:15-16), they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their powers and faculties so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.

Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, 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 the sacred Scriptures. Thus “all Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Gk. text).²³

²³ Austin Flannery, O.P. gen. ed. *Vatican Council II - The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Vatican Collection Vol. 1, New Revised Edition*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1992.

Obviously, this view is quite different from the traditional Catholic scholasticism view that regarded Scripture as absolutely immune from error.²⁴ Actually, it was Hans Küng, the well-known theologian, who concluded that “the Bible is unequivocally man’s word: collected, written down, given varied emphases, sentence by sentence by quite definite individuals and developed in different ways. Hence it is not without shortcomings and mistakes, concealment and confusion, limitations and errors.”²⁵

It is quite clear that the Vatican II Catholicism limits the veracity and authority of the Bible only to those pertaining to salvation. Everything else in the Bible is not considered binding, just like Küng claimed that “there is not a single text in Scripture asserting its freedom from error.”²⁶

5. Liberal Evangelicals: In this theological camp, the proponents are those who restrict the truthfulness and authority of the Scriptures to the salvation aspects. A good example of this view is C.S. Lewis who was believed to have embraced the idea that inspiration is not “always present in the same mode and the same degree” right through the Bible.²⁷

²⁴ “According to Pius XII, the Bible (the Vulgate), as the Church has understood and does now understand, is free from all error in matters of faith and morals. Consequently, as the Church herself testifies, it can be safely quoted, without the least fear of erring, in disputations, public readings, and sermons,” Hardon, S.J., *Catholic Dictionary*, 48.

²⁵ Cited by Demarest and Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 134. See also Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 6th edition. (New York: Macmillan, 1982), 470-75.

²⁶ Ibid. See also Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, chapter on defining terms, 138-73.

²⁷ See Norman L. Geisler, *Decide for Yourself*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, 95-96.

The idea of the presence of ‘errors’ in the Bible did not disturb Lewis’ concept of biblical inspiration.²⁸ Lewis concluded:

The human qualities of the raw materials show through. Naïvete, error, contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness is not removed. The total result is not ‘the Word of God’ in the sense that every passage, in itself gives impeccable science or history.²⁹

For Lewis, the ‘errors’ in the Bible simply reflect the human qualities in its formation but without having affected the extent of its inspiration. In other words, according to this view, the Bible is inspired, but not every passage is inspired to the same degree of inspiration. Accounts like the Genesis pagan myths and non-historical narratives like Job and Jonah, all seemed to confirm this view of various degrees of inspiration in the Bible.

C.S. Lewis was not alone in this view of various degrees of biblical inspiration. Dewey Beegle also spoke of the various kinds of inspiration when he said:

The ‘sent ones’ of Scripture—Moses, the leading prophets, Jesus, and Paul—were recipients of special charismata, whereas the lesser writers of the Bible wrote on the basis of their natural abilities and status within the covenant community. The former mode of inspiration ceased with the close of the New Testament canon, whereas the latter ‘process of reinterpretation and application will continue as long as man exists.’³⁰

²⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958, 111-12.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Dewey Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973, 76.

There are at least two things to bear in mind in this view of biblical inspiration: (1) Authors of Christian literature today are inspired to the same degree as the original writers of Scripture; and (2) The Bible is a collection of contradictory traditions.³¹ Basically, to Beegle, the Bible is “inspired from cover to cover, human mistakes and all.”³² Put in another way, insofar as the Bible brings people to salvation in Christ, it is infallible, but it contains factual errors, so it not inerrant.

6. Protestant Fundamentalism: The fundamentalist view of Scripture, as espoused by John R. Rice, embraced the notion of inspiration as divine dictation, that is, God gave the actual words that men wrote down in Holy Scripture. Rice argued, “A secretary is not ashamed to take dictation from a man. Why would a prophet be ashamed to take dictation from God.”³³

According to Rice, Holy Scripture came into existence as a result of a direct straight line from God to the human authors. As Demarest put it, “Rice seeks to safeguard the human element in Scripture by maintaining that God prepared the writers in advance so that their style, vocabulary, and personality are included in the writing in accord with God’s plan.”³⁴

³¹ Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 134.

³² Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*, 208.

³³ John R. Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book—The Bible*. Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Sword of the Lord, 1969, 287.

³⁴ Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 135.

For Rice, if the Bible was to be really God's inspired Word, the notion of biblical authors engaging in historical research or getting their facts from oral tradition or eye witnesses, must be dismissed. In other words, the production of the Bible must be the result of God himself.

Another consequent development in this line of thinking was that Rice's view came to be regarded as docetic since he concluded that "the Scriptures are fundamentally the Word of God, not the word of men, except in some incidental and controlled and limited sense."³⁵

7. Most Church Fathers, Reformers, and Evangelicals: This group forms what is regarded traditionally as the high view of biblical inspiration. Historically, most orthodox theologians have believed that the production of the Bible involved God supernaturally moving the human authors so that "although they wrote in accord with their own interests, style, and abilities, the resultant documents are his Word, authoritative in matters of faith and practice, and truthful in all they affirm."³⁶

Pinnock describes this view of Scripture as really the majority opinion of Christian theologians when he says, "Traditionally, the church has received the Bible as an oracular, God-breathed book, and held the conviction almost unanimously until the great defection of modern

³⁵ Rice, *Our God-Breathed Book*, 141.

³⁶ Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 135. See also Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, on the Patristic thinking on inspiration. These early apologists and theologians "simply echoed the Biblical formulas in describing their Sacred Scriptures. For them the Bible was 'the holy writings,' the 'sacred letters,' a work of 'divine writers,' in 'the holy books,' 'sacred books,' 'the divine word,' and so forth," p.20.

times.”³⁷

According to Demarest,³⁸ many early Church Fathers emphasized the divine side of Scripture by means of numerous vivid analogies:

(a) Justin Martyr is believed to have described biblical inspiration as the process by which the Holy Spirit so worked on the human writers like a musician plays on a harp or a lyre.

(b) Athenagoras regarded the Bible writer as ‘a stringed instrument which the Holy Ghost put in motion, in order to draw out of it the divine harmonies of life.’³⁹

(c) Tertullian, an early Latin father who gave himself passionately to the propagation and defense of the gospel, described the individual passages of the Old Testament as ‘the commandments of God’ and the canon as the Scripture of the Holy Ghost.’⁴⁰

(d) Irenaeus, one of the Greek fathers of the church, in the Western theological environment, held high verbal inspiration and the veracity of the entire Bible. He wrote, “The Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God (i.e., Christ) and His Spirit.”⁴¹ Irenaeus is one of the earliest authors whose works survive to argue from

³⁷ Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation - The Foundation of Christian Theology*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1971, 147.

³⁸ Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 135-138.

³⁹ Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 135-36. Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, IX.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, XXVII; cited by Demarest and Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁴¹ Ibid. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.28.2; Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

Scripture as a whole, New Testament as well as Old Testament and a range of New Testament writings approximating the present canon of Scripture.

(e) Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the Cappadocian fathers who was elected bishop of Constantinople during the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381, reasoned that the smallest stroke of Scripture derived from the Holy Spirit, and that even the slightest nuance of the inspired writer is not in vain.

(f) Jerome, a Bible scholar and translator who aimed at introducing the best of Greek learning to Western Christianity, upheld verbal, plenary inspiration when he stated that “the individual sayings, syllables, phonetic markings, and punctuations in divine Scripture are filled with meaning.”⁴²

Apparently, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria accepted the books of the Apocrypha as canonical. However, on the other hand, Church fathers like Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Jerome (an authority on Hebrew), strongly opposed and rejected all the extra-canonical writings. Actually, it was against Jerome’s will that the Apocryphal books were included in the Latin Vulgate.⁴³

(g) Augustine of Hippo, who is considered to be antiquity’s greatest theologian, was a staunch defender of the verbal inspiration of canonical Scripture. Although he asserted that the biblical authors wrote with an active mind, he stressed the divine initiative by stating that the

⁴² Jerome, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne, vols. XXVI, 481: cited by Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-83), 1:232.

⁴³ Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

apostles wrote at the command of Christ, the Lord using them “as if they were His own hands.”⁴⁴ According to a letter written to Jerome by Augustine, he said, “I believe most firmly that not one of those authors has erred in any respect in writing.”⁴⁵

In fact, for Augustine, the truthfulness of Holy Scripture included even the discussions of natural sciences and history. The authority of Scripture is unquestionable because of its divine involvement. Augustine concluded, “Faith will totter if the authority of Scripture begins to shake.”⁴⁶

He also held the belief that the Old Testament consisted of forty-four books, including six Apocryphal books. The issue of extra-canonical writings created uncertainties for him because of his unfamiliarity with Hebrew and his high regard for the LXX translation. However, he made a clear distinction between the “canonical” Scriptures, those that were accepted by the Jews and the Apocrypha - those not received by the Jews.

(h) Martin Luther, that major leader of the Reformation, believed that since Scripture is from the Holy Spirit it has the authority of God himself. For Luther, the function of the written Word is to teach Jesus Christ, the living Word. Consequently, he referred to the Bible as the

⁴⁴ Cited by Demarest *Integrative Theology*, 136. Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels*, 1.35.54.

⁴⁵ Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136. Augustine, “Letter,” LXXXII.3.

⁴⁶ Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 1.37.4.

swaddling clothes and manger in which Christ is wrapped and laid.⁴⁷

Luther maintained that in both its salvific and nonsalvific teachings the Scriptures have never erred. He stated categorically, “The Holy Spirit is not a fool or a drunkard to express one point, not to say one word, in vain.”⁴⁸ Another one of Luther’s radical decisions was the elimination, in his German translation of the Bible, of the Apocryphal writings which has been inserted by Rome.

However, using his own preferred standard of canonicity – that which teaches Jesus Christ, Luther concluded that the book of Jude, Hebrews, James, and Revelation were not to be considered a part of Scripture because none of these books seemed to lay the foundations of gospel faith. Consequently, he decided that these four books be awarded a secondary status in the New Testament. This was not to be seen as a sign of undermining or portraying a low view of the Scriptures at all. In fact, Luther was committed to the authority of Scripture. The Scriptures he believed were canonical, he held them in great honour – fully inspired, inerrant, and authoritative. Basically, it was his faulty measurement of canonicity which led him to question or dishonour the reliability and authoritativeness of the books mentioned.

⁴⁷ According to Demarest, ‘Neothodox authorities deny that Luther established an identity between the Word of God and the written Scriptures. They maintain that Luther viewed the Scriptures as a vehicle of the Word, i.e., as a witness to Christ. On this showing the Bible is the authoritative Word of God only as it witnesses to Christ and as the Spirit animates the text to the life. “For Luther, Scripture is not the Word, but only witness to the Word, and it is from Him whom it conveys that it derives the authority it enjoys.” J.K.S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture* (New York: Harper, 1957), 72.’

⁴⁸ Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136. Martin Luther, *WA*, LIV:39.

(i) John Calvin, the father of Reformed and Presbyterian doctrine and theology, strongly believed that the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, was God's Word. He stated emphatically, "The Bible has come down to us from God."⁴⁹ According to Calvin, God is the author of Scripture in its entirety – the words, propositions, and doctrines it contains. He even went as far as saying that the biblical writers, the human authors, were simply "clerks,"⁵⁰ "penmen,"⁵¹ "amanuenses,"⁵² and "organs and instruments"⁵³ of the Holy Spirit.

At first glance, it seems Calvin espoused the dictation theory, but he basically attempted to convey that 'if the Bible came down to us from God,' then God was very much in total control of that process that produced the Bible. To Calvin it was sheer logic, 'God is the ultimate author of Scripture, God is sovereign, therefore, Scripture must be infallible.' There is no doubt that Calvin held the high view of Scripture, especially when he concluded that Scripture "is the certain and unerring Rule,"⁵⁴ "sacred and inviolable truth,"⁵⁵ the "sure and inviolable record,"⁵⁶

⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes*, I.18.4; Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁵⁰ John Calvin, *Harmony of the Gospels*, 1:127; Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁵¹ John Calvin, *Psalms*, 3:205; Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁵² Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.8.8-9; Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁵³ John Calvin, *Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians*, 87; *Minor Prophets*, 3:197; cf. *Pastoral Epistles*, 249; Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Psalms*, 1:11, Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁵⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.6, Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁵⁶ John Calvin, *Job*, 744, Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

and “unerring light.”⁵⁷

However, although the Bible is not, and was never meant to be, a scientific or history textbook, Calvin strongly believed that whenever it mentions scientific or historic matters, the facts are true.⁵⁸ According to Calvin, full conviction of the divine authority and veracity of Scripture is imparted by the compelling witness of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁹

It is quite apparent that Luther and all the other Reformers held the view that Scripture does not err. However, these godly men also wrestled with the theological and practical implications of their views. For example, Luther stated, “But everyone, indeed, knows that at times they [the fathers] have erred, as men will; therefore, I am ready to trust them only when they give me evidence for their opinions from Scripture, which has never erred.”⁶⁰ However, at the same time he could make a statement like this, “When one often reads [in the Bible] that great numbers of people were slain—for example, eighty thousand—I believe that hardly one thousand were actually killed. What is meant is the whole people.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ Calvin, *Psalms*, 4:480. It is believed that the only errors John Calvin ever admitted to were copyists’ typos in some of the manuscripts, Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Psalms*, 5:184-85, Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁵⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.7.5; I.8.13; *John*, 2:101. Neo-orthodox authorities such as Karl Barth, W. Niesel, and J.K.S. Reid deny that Calvin taught a doctrine of verbal inspiration and verbal infallibility. “Calvin is no verbal inspirationist” (Reid, *Authority of Scripture*, 36; cf. 47). According to the neo-orthodox, Calvin taught that the Bible is not the Word of God, but is only a witness to the Word, i.e., to Christ himself. The written record *becomes* the Word of God as the Spirit vivifies it to the hearer or reader. See Reid, *ibid.*, 51, Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁶⁰ *Luther’s Works*, vol. 32. p.11, Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

⁶¹ *Luther’s Works*, vol. 54, ed. & trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p.452, Cited by Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

It must be noted at this juncture that the major branches of Protestantism generally uphold the high view of Scripture in their confessional statements or articles of faith. The Lutheran communion do so in The Formula of Concord (Epitome), the Reformed do so in The Belgic Confession (Article III), The Second Helvetic Confession (chapter I), The Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter I.5, 6, 8), the Anglican tradition in The Thirty-Nine Articles (Article XX), and the Baptists in The New Hampshire Confession (Article I).⁶²

World renowned theologians like B.B. Warfield also believed that the notion of biblical inspiration is best described by phrases like “concurrent operation” and “concurrent authorship”⁶³- that is, Scripture is not only a human witness and medium of divine revelation but also a divinely inspired witness and medium. To Warfield, the human activity involving all the research and data collection and compiling—the logical reasoning, was mysteriously intertwined with the divine operation of the Holy Spirit’s superintendence, direction, and control. The writers were not simply assisted and illumined by the Holy Spirit, but rather guided by the Spirit so that what they wrote was actually sanctioned by God himself. In other words, as a divine-human product, Scripture is “God-breathed” (II Timothy 3:16), - that is, produced by the creative breath of the Almighty God, not in its thought only but also in its words, and not in part but in full.

⁶² See Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 137.

⁶³ B.B. Warfield, “The Real Problem of Inspiration,” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 173.

Therefore, “the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed on them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will.”⁶⁴ According to Warfield, the Word of God is inerrant. Hence he argued and stated emphatically, “No single error has yet been demonstrated to occur in the Scriptures as given by God to His Church.”⁶⁵

Another distinguished theologian, Carl F. H. Henry, defines biblical inspiration as that “supernatural influence upon divinely chosen prophets and apostles whereby the Spirit of God assures the truth and trustworthiness of their oral and written proclamation.”⁶⁶ According to Henry, the inspiration of Scripture has to be understood in its entirety. In other words, it does not continue – nor is it sporadic. It is complete. The Scriptures, in their written form stand as the very Word of God. Demarest comments on Henry’s understanding of inerrancy, infallibility and verbal inerrancy, three important words often discussed in their relation to biblical inspiration. He writes:

Henry refers *inerrancy* to the veracity of the inspired autographs and *infallibility* to the qualified perfection of the manuscript copies and translations. He urges that the term inerrancy not be dropped, but retained and carefully defined. By verbal inerrancy Henry means (1) that the Bible teaches truth in matters of history and ethics; (2) that God’s truth resides in the words, propositions, and sentences of the Bible; and (3) that

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 225.

⁶⁶ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:129.

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only original writings (autographs) are error-free. Inerrancy does not imply modern scientific precision, does not mean verbal exactitude in the apostolic quotation of Old Testament texts, and does not nullify the need for personal faith in Christ, who is the living Word of God.⁶⁷

Another historically significant document on biblical inspiration, The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy which was formulated and produced by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (1978), is in harmony with Henry's position. Basically, it supports the notion that the human authors of Scripture had distinctive (individual) personalities and literary skills, the Holy Spirit guided them in their writing so that the words they wrote constitute the very Word of God. According to Article XII, since the author of Scripture is God, what is recorded in the Scriptures "is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit." This Statement respects the cultural environment in which the sacred writings were written. This is reflected in the explanation: "Although Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense that its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventions of a particular period, so that the application of its

⁶⁷ Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 137.

principles today calls for a different sort of action.”⁶⁸

As we search the Scriptures, we discover that even the biblical authors did not claim to possess absolute views or perspectives of the truth they heralded. The psalmist declared, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.” (Psalm 139:6); “Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.” (Psalm 119:33-34); “Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know,” (Job 42:3). Even Peter himself says about the prophets, “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the suffering of Christ and the glories that would follow,” (I Peter 1:10). It is surprising to note that Paul, the apostle, is rather careful not to equate his own opinions

⁶⁸ “Exposition,” of the “Articles of Affirmation and Denial,” reprinted by Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:218. Clark Pinnock, in *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), attempts to mediate between a conservative evangelical posture on one hand, and a liberal evangelical or neoorthodox stance on the other. Whereas in his earlier work, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), Pinnock vigorously insisted that the Bible is the Word of God, in *The Scripture Principle* he implies that the Bible plus the Holy Spirit is the Word of God (pp. 57, 198), or that the Bible contains the Word of God (pp. 56, 99). In his earlier work, Pinnock argued that Jesus and the biblical writers taught the full inerrancy of Scripture, and that errors in the Bible would impugn the character of God. In *The Scripture Principle*, however, Pinnock claims that neither Jesus nor the apostles taught inerrancy (p.57): “The case for inerrancy just isn’t there” (p. 58; cf. P. 59). Pinnock now argues that the Bible is infallible in its testimony to Christ, but is flawed in its teachings concerning science and history (pp. 99-100; 104-5). The Genesis record of the Fall is probably “saga” to be interpreted existentially (pp. 67-68, 116), and the Jonah story is “a didactic fiction” (p. 117). Given these admissions, it is difficult to see how Pinnock’s position can be accommodated to the historic position of the church.

on marriage with the mind of God, though he claims to have the Spirit of Christ: “To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her;” “Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy;” and “In my judgement, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God,” (I Corinthians 7:12,25,40).

All this to show that the doctrine of biblical inspiration is not as a clear cut doctrine as we would like it to be. Therefore, the evangelical position on biblical inspiration has been further developed and expounded in numerous informative and controversial studies.⁶⁹ These developments have all showed that there is more to the Bible than what we have come to comprehend.

According to Warfield,⁷⁰ there has been at least two major approaches or movements of thought on the development of the doctrine of inspiration - the rationalistic view and the mystical view.

The Rationalistic view is concerned about distinguishing between the inspired and the un-inspired elements within the Scriptures. Warfield explains this approach to the Scriptures:

⁶⁹ For example, Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels, eds., *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); D.A. Carson and John Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); Ronald Youngblood, ed., *Evangelicals and Inerrancy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984); and Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce Demarest, eds., *Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response* (Chicago: Moody, 1984).

⁷⁰ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948, 112-114.

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With forerunners among the Humanists, this mode of thought was introduced by the Socinians, and taken up by the Syncretists in Germany, the Remonstrants in Holland, and the Jesuits in the Church of Rome. In the great life-and-death struggle of the eighteenth century it obtained great vogue among the defenders of supernatural religion, in their desperate efforts to save what was of even more importance, – just as a hard-pressed army may yield to the foe many an outpost which justly belongs to it, in the effort to save the citadel. In the nineteenth century it has retained a strong hold, especially upon apologetical writers, chiefly in the three forms which affirm respectively that only the *mysteries* of the faith are inspired, i.e. things undiscoverable by unaided reason, – that the Bible is inspired only in *matters of faith and practice*, – and that the Bible is inspired only in its *thoughts* or *concepts*, not in its words. But although this legacy from the rationalism of an evil time still makes its appearance in the pages of many theological writers, and has no doubt affected the faith of a considerable number of Christians, it has failed to supplant in either the creeds of the church or the hearts of the people the church-doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Bible, i.e. the doctrine that the Bible is inspired not *in part* but *fully*, in all its elements alike, – things discoverable by reason as well as mysteries, matters of history and science as well as of faith and practice, words as well as thoughts.⁷¹

The other view of biblical inspiration is called the Mystical view. Warfield explains this approach to Scripture:

Its characteristic conception is that the Christian man has something within himself, – call it enlightenment reason, spiritual insight, the Christian consciousness, the witness of the Spirit, or call it what you will, – to the test of which every “external revelation” is to be subjected, and according to the decision of which are the contents of the Bible to be valued. Very varied forms have been taken by this conception; and more or less expression has been given to it, in one form or another, in every age. In its extremer manifestations, it has formerly tended to sever itself from the main stream of Christian thought and even to form separated sects. But in our own century, through the great

⁷¹ Ibid., 112-113.

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genius of Schleiermacher it has broken in upon the church like a flood, and washed into every corner of the Protestant world. As a consequence, we find men everywhere who desire to acknowledge as from God only such Scripture as “finds them,” – who cast the clear objective enunciation of God’s will to the mercy of the currents of thought and feeling which sweep up and down in their own souls, – who “persist” sometimes, to use a sharp but sadly true phrase of Robert Alfred Vaughan’s “in their conceited rejection of the light without until they have turned into darkness their light within.” We grieve over the inroads which this essentially naturalistic mode of thought has made in the Christian thinking of the day. But great and deplorable as they have been, they have not been so extensive as to supplant the church-doctrine of the absolute authority of the objective revelation of God in his Word, in either the creeds of the church, or the hearts of the people. Despite these attempts to introduce lowered conceptions, the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, which looks upon them as an oracular book, in all its parts and elements, alike, of God, trustworthy in all its affirmations of every kind, remains to-day, as it has always been, the vital faith of the people of God, and the formal teaching of the organized church.⁷²

In the light of the concerns raised and discussed in these two different views on biblical inspiration, we cannot help but ask the question: How did the early church develop such a defined doctrine, even in that embryonic stage of the church?

Therefore, in attempt to delve into this question carefully, we must consider one of the key topics related to the historical development of biblical inspiration, namely, the formation of the canon of Scripture. How were ‘the books of the Bible chosen to be included in the Bible’ as we have it today?

The Formation of the Canon of Scripture

⁷² Ibid., 113-114.

The New and Concise Bible Dictionary shows that “the word $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma$ ” signified a rod or rule by which things were tested. It is thus used by Paul in Gal. vi.16; Phil. iii.16. As to the scriptures the expression refers to what books should be included: the ‘canon’ of scripture is often spoken of, and the books are called ‘canonical’ or uncanonical.”⁷³

F.F. Bruce defines the ‘canon of Scripture’ as “the list of books contained in scripture, the list of books recognized as worthy to be included in the sacred writings of a worshipping community.”⁷⁴

In the ecclesiastical context, ‘canon’ should be defined as “the list of writings acknowledged by the Church as documents of the divine revelation.”⁷⁵ This understanding of the word appears to agree with the way it was first employed by Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, in a letter which was circulated in AD 367.⁷⁶

Miller also agrees with this understanding of the word “canon” and provides a further description and other related meanings. He says that the word ‘canon’ means then:

- (1) A straight rod or bar, used especially to keep things straight; a straight-edge, or a bar of wood or metal having one side true to a straight line, and used for testing surfaces, edges, etc., and for ruling;
- (2) a measuring-rod;
- (3) a rule or line used by

⁷³ *A New and Concise Bible Dictionary*. (formerly published by George Morrish of London) Bible Truth Publishers: Addison, Illinois, USA., p. 152.

⁷⁴ Bruce, F.F. (Frederick Fyvie) *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1988., 17.

⁷⁵ Hanson, R.P.C. *Origen’s Doctrine of Tradition*. London, 1954, 93, 133; cf. his *Tradition in the Early Church*. London, 1962, 247.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* See pp. 71, 78, 79, 208ff.

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carpenters and masons for measuring or for keeping things straight. (4) As a metaphor, it means “anything that serves to regulate or determine other things; a rule.” (5) A standard or testing rule in ethics, art, music, or language (grammar, rhetoric, logic). ‘The term was applied in antiquity to the principle of art, fixing the proper length of the finger of a statue, the height of the face, the proportions of the limbs, etc.’ (6) A standard, or rule, or conduct, living, action, or judging. (7) A boundary line or limit.⁷⁷

According to F.F. Bruce, “the word ‘canon’ came into the English language, through Latin, from the Greek word *kanōn*.⁷⁸ In Greek it meant a rod, especially a straight rod used as a rule. It is from this usage we have developed the word commonly used in the English language as ‘rule’ or ‘standard.’ However, it is important to note that even before the word ‘canon’ came to be used the way we understand it within the church context today, it was used in other uses also.⁷⁹ Bruce explains further:

In the earlier Christian centuries this was a summary of Christian teaching, believed to reproduce what the apostles themselves taught, by which any system of doctrine offered for Christian acceptance, or any interpretation of biblical writings, was to be assessed. But when once the limits of holy scripture came to be generally agreed upon, holy scripture itself came to be regarded as the rule of faith. For example, Thomas Aquinas (c 1225-1274) says that ‘canonical scripture alone is the rule faith.’ From another theological perspective the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), after

⁷⁷ Miller, H.S. *General Biblical Introduction*. Houghton, New York: The Word-Bearer Press, 1937, 87.

⁷⁸ Bruce explains that ‘the Greek word was probably borrowed from the Semitic word which appears in Hebrew as *q-neh*, ‘reed,’ ‘rod.’ From the same origin come Latin *canna* and Eng. ‘cane.’

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 18. Canon also meant ‘the rule of faith’ or ‘the rule of truth.’

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listing the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, adds: ‘All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life. These words affirm the status of holy scripture as the ‘canon’ or ‘standard’ by which Christian teaching and action must be regulated. While the ‘canon’ of scripture means the *list* of books accepted as holy scripture, the other sense of ‘canon’ – *rule* or *standard* – has rubbed off on this one, so that the ‘canon’ of scripture is understood to be the *list* of books which are acknowledged to be, in a unique sense, the *rule* of belief and practice.⁸⁰

The question still remains - How did certain books or documents come to be accepted as the canon? Who was responsible for that decision to include and/or exclude certain books? What was the criteria used to process that decision?

According to the Christian belief, the Christian Bible, comprising of the Old and the New Testaments, is “a collection of books given of God to be the authoritative rule of faith and practice.”⁸¹

Christianity, like other religions, has a special ‘book,’ the Bible, which has a regulative function. Actually, conformity to what the Bible teaches or prescribes has always been a major test of loyalty to the Christian faith and practice. There are two major divisions in the Bible – the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word ‘testament’ which comes from Latin *testamentum*,⁸² a translation of the Greek word *diath' k'*. F.F. Bruce explains:

⁸⁰ Bruce, F.F. *Canon of Scripture*, 18. See also Thomas Aquinas, *On the Gospel of St. John*, Lesson 6 on John 21 (*sola canonica scriptura est regula fidei*, perhaps ‘...a rule of faith’); Westminster Confession of Faith, 1 § 2.

⁸¹ Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 411.

⁸² Bruce, *Canon of Scripture*, 19.

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This Greek word may indeed mean will, but it is used more widely of various kinds of settlement or agreement, not so much of one which is made between equals as of one in which a party superior in power or dignity confers certain privileges on an inferior, while the inferior undertakes certain obligations towards the superior. It is used repeatedly in both Old and New Testaments, both in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and in the original Greek of the New Testament. It is usually rendered by our word ‘covenant,’ and its most distinctive usage relates to an agreement between God and human beings. Here, of course, there can be no question of an agreement between equals.⁸³

The Old Testament: This portion of the Bible was written in Hebrew, “except Ezra iv.8 to vi.18; vii. 12-26; Jer.x.11; Dan. ii.4 to vii. 28: these portions were written in Chaldee or Aramaic.”⁸⁴ The Old Testament, in our English Bibles, is divided into four parts: (1) The Pentateuch, or the five books of Moses (*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*); (2) The Historical Books (*from Joshua to the end of Esther*); (3) The Poetical Books (*from Job to the end of Song of Songs - sometimes called Song of Solomon*); and (4) The Prophetical Books, from Isaiah to Malachi.⁸⁵ However, the Jews had different divisions:

The Jews divided the Old Testament into *three* parts. 1. The Law (*Torah*), the five books of Moses. 2. The Prophets (*Nebiim*), including Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets. 3. The Writings (*Kethubim*, or *Hagiographa*, ‘holy writings’), including *a*, the Psalms, Proverbs, Job; *b*, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther; *c*,

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *Concise Bible Dictionary*, 127.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles. The books are in this order in the Hebrew Bible.⁸⁶

F.F. Bruce agrees with this conclusion when he says “the books of the Hebrew Bible are traditionally twenty-four in number, arranged in three divisions,”⁸⁷ and he lists the same three divisions.

We must note at this juncture that the Torah was ‘the Bible’ of the Jews and of the early Church. In fact, a closer look at the various discussions Jesus Christ had with the religious leaders of Israel on the meaning of the Scriptures show that they might have differed in the meaning of the Scriptures, but not in the point of reference. In other words, when Jesus Christ and the religious leaders of Israel spoke of ‘the Scriptures’ both parties “knew which writings they had in mind and could distinguish them from other writings which were not included in ‘the scriptures.’”⁸⁸ F.F. Bruce is correct when he makes this emphatic statement that “when we speak of ‘the scriptures’ we mean ‘the sacred writings’ as distinct from other writings: to us ‘scripture’ and ‘writing’ are separate words with distinct meanings. But in Hebrew and Greek one and the same word does duty for both ‘writing’ and ‘scripture’: in these languages ‘the scriptures’ are simply ‘the writings’—that is to say, ‘the writings’ *par excellence*.”⁸⁹

This shows that the early church’s use of the ‘writings’— the Old

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 29.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Testament, was not something they concocted but rather learned from Jesus Christ himself as he taught from those ‘writings.’ The teachings of Jesus Christ popularized the Old Testament. The Pentateuch (*torah*), in particular, became a totally new book when Jesus began his teachings and insisted that “it is written . . .,” or “you have heard it said . . .” Actually, the Old Testament was really a book about Jesus Christ. This was the Bible of the early Church. It also seems evident in the Old Testament that there was an obvious public recognition of the Scriptures as conveying the very word of God. Phrases like “thus says the LORD” and “the LORD said,” all point to the Scriptures as the authoritative rule of faith and practice. The authority of God’s Word – the ‘sacred writings’ was acknowledged in what was read. Miller is correct when he writes about the canonicity of the Scriptures:

The canonicity of the Scriptures, as a whole, is the right they have to be considered canonical and authoritative because each book is canonical. That is, their canonicity represents the fact that they have, book by book, been proven to be in conformity to a required standard, and to possess divine authority as containing the God-given rules of faith and practice and the true standard of moral and religious duty. The Scriptures have conformed to a standard, and therefore they are a standard.⁹⁰

As we think about the formation of the Old Testament, we observe that the Bible does not give much detail about how it was canonized. However, although the Bible seems to be quiet about its canonization, we find numerous references to how it was preserved as sacred writings. The

⁹⁰ Miller, *Biblical Introduction*, 89.

account recorded in Exodus 24:3-8 makes an important point here:

When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."(NIV)

It is rather fascinating to note that this text is highlighted in the New Testament, Hebrew 9:18-20:

This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God commanded you to keep." (NIV)

As already pointed out, Jesus' reference to the *Torah* was not coincidental. In fact, it is clear that he referred to the *Torah* and to the rest of the Old Testament in order to espouse his earthly mission. F.F. Bruce rightly points out the relationship between Jesus ministry and the Old Testament:

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According to Mark, he began his ministry in Galilee with the announcement: ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand’ (Mark 1:14). This was the good news which he proclaimed, inviting his hearers to believe it. Those of them who were familiar with the book of Daniel can scarcely have missed the reference in his words to the prophecy in that book concerning a coming day in which ‘the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed’ (Dan. 2:44 *cf* 7:14, 18, 27).⁹¹

Furthermore, we also find that the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament texts) are often referred to in the New Testament as ‘the law and the prophets.’ Jesus himself said that the golden rule sums up the “the law and the prophets,” – “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets,” Matthew 7:12. The apostle Paul claims that God’s way of righteousness set forth in the gospel which he preaches is attested by “the law and the prophets,” – “But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify,” Romans 3:21. Actually, sometimes the whole Old Testament is referred to as ‘*the law*,’ as in John 10:34, “Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, I have said you are gods?’” There is ample textual evidence in the Bible that when Jesus and the apostles debated with the Jewish teachers or theologians, they always appealed to ‘the Scriptures.’ Although they never seemed to have agreed on the actual issues at hand, they certainly seemed to have been in agreement on some authority of a ‘recognized’ body of authoritative writings.

The ‘recognized body of Scripture’ seemed to have included a

⁹¹ F.F. Bruce, *Canon of Scripture*, 27-28.

wider canon. Commenting on the use of the Septuagint in the early church, F.F. Bruce writes:

The scriptures known to Jesus and his disciples were no doubt the scrolls of the Hebrew Bible—the Law, the Prophets and the Writings—kept in the synagogues for use during regular services and possibly at other times. When Jesus was about to read the second lesson in the Nazareth synagogue on the first Sabbath that he visited his home town after the beginning of this public ministry, and ‘there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah’ (Luke 4:17), it was most probably a Hebrew scroll that he received. But even in Palestine, and not least in Jerusalem itself, there were many Greek-speaking Jews, Hellenists, and there were synagogues where they might go to hear the scriptures read and the prayers recited in Greek. Such was the Synagogue of the Freedmen where Stephen held debate in Jerusalem (Acts 6:9).⁹²

F.F. Bruce comments further on the use of the Septuagint in the New Testament:

While the New Testament writers all used the Septuagint, to a greater or lesser degree, none of them tells us precisely what the limits of its contents were. The ‘scriptures’ to which they appealed covered substantially the same range as the Hebrew Bible. We cannot say with absolute certainty, for example, if Paul treated Esther or the Song of Songs as scripture any more than we can say if those books belonged to the Bible which Jesus knew and used. Paul possibly alludes to Ecclesiastes when he says that creation was made subject to ‘vanity’ (Rom. 8:20), using the same word (Gk. *mataiot’ s*) as is used in the Septuagint for the refrain of that book: ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity’ (Eccles. 1:2; 12:8).⁹³

All this to show, again, that there was a high regard for the Hebrew

⁹² Ibid., 48-49.

⁹³ Ibid., 50.

Scriptures (the Septuagint) in their Greek translation as God’s Word. The question we should ask, then, is how did the early church formulate the writings that later came to be called the New Testament?

The New Testament: It is quite clear that Jesus Christ, the founder of the Church (Christianity) never wrote a book. We know, however, that he taught people by word of mouth and by his lifestyle. What we have recorded in the New Testament is what some of Jesus’ disciples or followers wrote. These ‘preserved writings’ became substitutes for the actual spoken word. For example, the apostle Paul says, “How I wish I could be with you and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you,” (Galatians 4:20). In other words, Paul is saying that ‘the letter’ represents his word as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Warfield is right when he sums up the early church’s view of the Bible:

It will suffice to remind ourselves that it looks upon the Bible as an oracular book, – as the Word of God in such a sense that whatever it says God says, – not a book, then, in which one may, by searching, find some word of God, but a book which may be frankly appealed to at any point with the assurance that whatever it may be found to say, that is the Word of God.⁹⁴

Warfield comments further:

The church has always believed her Scriptures to be the book of God, of which God was in such a sense the author that every one of its affirmations of whatever kind is to

⁹⁴ Warfield, *Authority of the Bible*, 106.

be esteemed as the utterance of God, of infallible truth and authority.⁹⁵

F.F. Bruce agrees when he comments:

To those who confessed him (Jesus) as Lord his words were at least as authoritative as those of Moses and the prophets. They were transmitted as a most important element in the 'tradition' of early Christianity, together with the record of his works, his death and resurrection. These were 'delivered' by original witnesses and 'received' in turn by others not simply as an outline of historical events but as the church's confession of faith and as the message which it was commissioned to spread abroad. It was by means of this 'tradition' that the Christians of the first two centuries were able to understand the Old Testament documents as the scriptures which bore witness to Christ.⁹⁶

But the question still remains - How did the New Testament come to be one single, canonized document? Furthermore, none of the apostles left us with a list of books to be received as authoritative.

The insightful words of Brevard Childs are worth considering at this juncture. Childs points out that we need to pay careful attention to two aspects, namely, the historical and theological dimensions of canonization, before we can understand the New Testament canon.⁹⁷ He concludes:

There is broad agreement that the canon of the New Testament gradually developed as a part of the larger growth of the Christian church during the second century. By AD 200 the four gospels

⁹⁵ Ibid., 112.

⁹⁶ Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 118.

⁹⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon - An Introduction*. Valley Forge (Pennsylvania): Trinity Press International, reprinted 1994, 18.

were widely reckoned as Scripture on a par with the Old Testament along with a corpus of Pauline letters. However, the process of determining the outer limits of the apostolic writings developed, often in heated debate, until the end of the fourth century at which time both the Eastern and Western branches of the church reached a decision regarding the canon's scope which then generally became normative for the ancient church.⁹⁸

Indeed, the history of the canonical process shows that this task was not an easy one. Achtemeier writes:

Some books were accepted at an early time, later rejected, and still later included (e.g., the Revelation of John). Other books were accepted late (e.g., the Epistle of James), while still others were accepted fairly early on, only to be rejected later (e.g., the Epistle of Barnabas). If the boundaries of the canon are apostolically determined, why was there so little agreement on what that apostolic determination was? . . . The canon was assembled over a long period of time, with opinions differing in different parts of the church, and indeed opinions differing in the same areas at different periods of time. The canon, in short, was only finally determined on the basis of long experience of the church with a large variety of writings, some of which, in that collective experience, were to be included in the canon, and hence to be regarded as inspired, while others were to be excluded, and hence to be regarded as lacking in inspiration.⁹⁹

When we consider the process that led to the canonization of the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture - Problems and Proposals*. The Westminster Press, 1980, 120.

New Testament, there are important tests¹⁰⁰ to bear in mind.

1. Apostolic Age test: To the early Christians, Jesus Christ and the apostles had set an example on the authority of the Old Testament. In other words, what Jesus Christ and the apostles said or taught “had axiomatic authority”¹⁰¹ For example, we read of the early Christians being instructed - “distinguish between spirits” (I Cor. 12:10); “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God;” (I John 4:2-3); and ‘no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit,’ (I Cor. 12:3). Even when Paul found out that phony letters were being circulated in his name, he gave his friends the criteria for recognizing his letters. I Cor. 16:21 “I, Paul write this greeting in my own hand,” Galatians 6:11 “See what large letter I use as I write to you with my own hand,” and II Thessalonians 3:17 “I, Paul write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.”

Therefore, we see that the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles, whether written or verbal, were considered authoritative.

2. Apostolic Authority test: The most authoritative documents available to the early church had been written by the apostles. The authenticity of these writings continued even long after the apostles had died. There were two important factors that were connected to this

¹⁰⁰ Bruce, *Canon of Scripture*, 255-269.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 255.

apostolic test: (a) Antiquity - A writing had to be the work of an apostle or of someone who had been closely connected to the apostles. Hence, all the writings of later dates were not to be included in this apostolic period. (b) Orthodoxy - A writing had to have recourse to the criterion of orthodoxy. Here, 'orthodoxy' meant "the apostolic faith - the faith set forth in the undoubted apostolic writings and maintained in the churches which had been founded by apostles."¹⁰² Thus if a written document had been known to be pseudonymous, it had no place in the canon. Furthermore, "anyone who was known to have composed a work explicitly in the name of an apostle would have met with even greater disapproval."¹⁰³

3. Catholicity test: This means that if a document received only local recognition, it was not likely to be considered as part of the canon of the catholic church. If a letter received a universal recognition, chances of it being authoritative scripture were greater. However, it must be noted that each individual document began with a local acceptance before gaining a more widespread recognition.

4. Traditional Use test: This was a powerful test a book had to go through before being considered for canonization because 'what has been believed everywhere, always, by all.' "If any church leader came along in the third or fourth century with a previously unknown book, recommending it as genuinely apostolic, he would have found great difficulty in gaining acceptance for it: his fellow-Christians would simply

¹⁰² Ibid., 260.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 261.

have said, ‘But no one has ever heard of it!’ Or if the book had been known for some generations, but had never been treated as holy scripture, it would have been very difficult to win recognition for it as such.”¹⁰⁴

Therefore, the possibility of adding other works to the canon (the tradition of the church) was a foreign concept. The tradition of all the churches was very strong.

5. Inspiration test: For the longest time during the early days, “inspiration and canonicity have been closely bound up together in Christian thinking: books were included in the canon, it is believed, because they were inspired; a book is known to be inspired because it is in the canon.”¹⁰⁵ Bruce comments on the understanding of inspiration in the early days of Christianity:

By inspiration in this sense is meant that operation of the Holy Spirit by which the prophets of Israel were enabled to utter the word of God. The vocabulary was theirs, the message was his. Only certain individuals, and only occasionally to them, was this enablement granted.”¹⁰⁶

Bruce explains further:

But at this stage inspiration is no longer a criterion of canonicity: it is a corollary of canonicity. ‘It was not until the red ribbon of the self-evident had been tied around the twenty-seven books of the New Testament that “inspiration” could serve theologians as

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 263.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 263.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 264.

an answer to the question: Why are these books different from all other books?¹⁰⁷

Indeed, the procedure that led to the canonization of Scripture, within the Protestant faith, spanned over hundreds of years. It was a rigorous exercise that involved, on the part of the compilers, many factors. Achtemeier is correct when he concludes that “the canon emerged as the result of community reflections on the common traditions in the light of the changing historical situation.”¹⁰⁸ Actually, the “three key components,”¹⁰⁹ namely, *tradition, situation, and respondent*, he discusses are worth considering as we attempt to understand the history and nature of biblical inspiration. Achtemeier argues:

The interaction of (*these*) three key components must be understood if we are to arrive at a clear conception of the way in which inspiration has been at work in the composition of the books of our Bible: the traditions of the faithful community, the situation facing the community, and the compiler of those traditions into a piece of literature, i.e., the “author.”¹¹⁰

1. *Tradition*: Events of the past shape the present. Traditions protect and guide a community in accordance with its past. This is also true in the Christian faith. The events of the Old Testament, and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 268. See K. Stendahl, “The Apocalypse of John and the Epistles of Paul...,” p.243. See also Paul Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia, 1980); A.C. Sundberg, Jr., “The Bible Canon and the Christian Doctrine of Inspiration,” *Interpretation* 29 (1975), p.352-371.

¹⁰⁸ Achtemeier, *Inspiration of Scripture*, 123.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 124-134.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 123.

similarly, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all gave structure to the traditions which were formulated by the early church for the benefit of the generations to come. Achtemeier explains:

Traditions provide the cradle in which each new generation of the community is nurtured. They provide contact with the past event that shapes their present and gives them hope for their future, and therefore traditions represent the historical reality of the community. To be out of touch with those traditions is to be out of touch with the reality upon which the community depends for its unique existence. The traditions are the building materials out of which the community continues to construct itself and to share its present and its future.¹¹¹

Another integral and significant aspect of the Christian tradition is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Achtemeier is correct when he says “the continuing presence of that Holy Spirit finds the vehicle for that presence precisely in the traditions that remind the community of the origin it had, and hence of the goal it is to pursue.”¹¹² Indeed, we cannot ignore the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our attempt to understand the history of biblical inspiration.

2. *Situation*: There is a close connection between ‘tradition’ and ‘situation.’ Achtemeier writes, “traditions take their origin as the response to an event of primal importance for the community of faith, it is also true that those traditions are used, and modified, when that same community faces new situations.”¹¹³ In other words, traditions become the

¹¹¹ Ibid., 126.

¹¹² Ibid., 125

¹¹³ Ibid., 126.

theoretical framework upon which a situation can be interpreted. When we consider the details of the exodus, a people group moving from Egypt, into the desert (becoming nomadic), and finally entering into the promised land, Canaan, we see that they had to re-interpret their traditions in order to survive in their new environment.

Furthermore, the coming of Jesus Christ – announcing the restoration of the Old Testament traditions in a new form, the subsequent establishment of the apostles, the compilation of the biblical data that led to the formation of the New Testament, *et cetera*, the establishment of the church and all the myriads of issues and concerns the church addressed in those early years, all got their illumination from interacting with the previous biblical literature. Incidentally, those re-interpretations became tradition for the next generations. Achtemeier observes:

As a result, each successive new generation has an enlarged traditional base from which to draw its own understanding of itself and its new situation. In that way, through the pressure of the situation, traditions assume a dynamic form and become the justification for change as they do for preservation of past values. Our Scriptures contain the repetitions, tensions, discrepancies, and differing interpretations that they do precisely because they contain within themselves the whole variety of interpretations and reinterpretations that the living community of faith has undertaken as it sought to understand its past and to respond faithfully to its present.¹¹⁴

For us to understand, appreciate, and respect the process that led to the canonization of the Bible, we have to evaluate our '*new situation*' by entering into the world of the Christian literature that gave birth to

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 130

Scripture as we have it today. Achtemeier comments:

It is the ever-changing response of tradition to new situation that has given to our Sacred Scriptures the characteristics they display and which must be taken into account in any attempt to understand how they have been inspired. In the understanding of that Scripture itself, the new situations into which the community of faith emerged, both in the Old and New Testaments, were not the result of blind historical forces, nor were the responses haphazard. The community of faith, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, is never totally removed from the guidance of God or the presence of his Spirit. For that reason, new situations and the new interpretations of tradition they elicited are understood by Scripture to be further evidence of the care and providence of the living God.¹¹⁵

Again, we see the continuing involvement of the Holy Spirit in the formation and canonization of Scripture.

3. *Respondent*: In this final component the emphasis is on the person(s) who contributed to the “formulation and reformation of tradition in specific situations,”¹¹⁶ those “who interpreted traditions in their situation and who have thus produced the inspired Scripture that we have.”¹¹⁷ Achtemeier explains:

It is not only the final assembler or compiler or author who shares in the inspiration which produced Scripture. Rather, inspiration must be understood to be at work in all who have shaped, preserved, and assembled portions of the traditions contained in the several books.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 131.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 132.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Here, inspiration is understood to be the entire process as ‘respondent(s) after respondent(s)’ carried out the task of preserving and shaping traditions within the community of faith through the help of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the presence of the Holy Spirit can not be overlooked in such a process as this. The whole idea of compiling those traditions by the different respondents, was the work of the Holy Spirit. Scripture is the result of the God working through people by His Spirit.

Thus, the inter-relation of these three components - tradition, situation, and respondent, shows the process that led to the final canonization of Scripture. The Holy Spirit is a key integral part of this whole process. The internal witness of the Holy Spirit in the canonization process is undeniable. The nature of the Bible calls us to accept and affirm that it is not a product of human ingenuity.

Summary

In this chapter we have presented a brief discussion on the history of the doctrine of biblical inspiration and the formation of the canon of Scripture. We began by looking at how various theological camps and movements in history viewed the Bible. At least nine views were discussed, namely, Roman Catholicism, Protestant Liberalism, Neo-orthodoxy theology, Vatican II Catholicism, Liberal Evangelicals, Protestant Fundamentalism, Church Fathers, Reformers, and Evangelicals. Although there were differing interpretations of Scripture, we observed

that there was a high regard for Scripture as God's authoritative word. There was a strong commitment to live by God's revelation. The formation of the canon of Scripture, both OT and NT, reveals a careful consideration on the part of the community of faith, of the doctrine of inspiration. The test for canonization, that is, (1) apostolic age test, (2) apostolic authority test, (3) catholicity test, (4) traditional use test, and (5) inspiration test, all show the special involvement of the community of faith in this divine process. It was not a whimsical decision at all. In fact, the existence of the canon in its final composition, testifies to a normative set of sacred writings which delimits the area within which biblical inspiration is to be understood. In short, the canon shows us which "Scriptures are inspired" and which "scriptures are not inspired."

In the light of this brief survey on the history of the doctrine of biblical inspiration, the purpose of the next chapter is to familiarize the reader with James Barr's view of biblical inspiration.