

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A CRITIQUE OF BARR'S VIEW OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

#### Introduction

In chapter two, we observed that Barr offers four propositions about his preferred view of biblical inspiration: (1) Inspiration is a minor note in Scripture. There is only one text in the Bible, II Timothy 3:16, where the term “*inspire*,” “*God-breathed*,” appears. In other words, the inspiration of Scripture was never intended to be an absolutely central and pivotal doctrine; (2) Inspiration rests within the tradition of the community of faith that produced the Scriptures, that is, inspiration must be thought of the entire process that led to the production of Scripture; (3) Inspiration includes the contemporary effects of scripture. Here, inspiration is understood to be continuous in both the church and the believer whenever the divine Spirit breathes through the Bible (the Bible becomes the word of God at that moment); and (4) Inspiration means that scripture is inspiring. In this fourth proposition, the key notion is that inspiration is considered as taking on various forms or degrees in the life of the writer according to the temperament and natural abilities of the ‘inspired’ writer.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary critique and to

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<sup>1</sup> James Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism: Biblical Foundations for Evangelical Christianity*. The Westminster Press, 1984. 124-130.

respond to Barr's four propositions about biblical inspiration. Each of these propositions in turn will be critiqued with careful examination of its deficiencies. In addition, Barr's two hermeneutical principles about the Scriptures will also be critically evaluated. The chapter will end with specific implications of Barr's view of biblical inspiration to our understanding of the Scriptures.

### **Proposition One: Inspiration is a Minor Note in Scripture**

Barr's first proposition is that inspiration is a minor note in the Scriptures since there is only one explicit reference to the topic of inspiration: II Timothy 3:16-17.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, he concludes that Paul's epistle to Timothy is "a late and marginal document" in the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

Examination of the biblical data, however, reveals that Barr's view cannot be sustained. The following points summarize our reservations and objections to Barr's first proposition.

In our previous analysis of the origin and the resultant nature of Scripture, we saw that the meaning of (D' NZ as used in the New Testament, implies divine origin or authorship.<sup>4</sup> The New Testament

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 124. Barr says that to make the idea of biblical inspiration "something central is to falsify the balance of biblical teaching."

<sup>3</sup> James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World*. London: SCM Press, 1973. 14.

<sup>4</sup> See H. Hübner, "' D' NZ," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol.1. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 261. ' D' NZ is nowhere used in the New Testament for non-biblical literature. The source of (D' NZ according to the New Testament, implies divine authorship. See also Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, Chicago: The University

authors seem to have understood that what (D' NZ says, God says.<sup>5</sup>

Grudem comments:

Once it is clear (1) that all of the Old Testament writings are considered God's words, (2) that the words of God are thought by both Old Testament and New Testament authors to be equal in character and truth-status to God's words spoken directly to men, and (3) that the New Testament writings, as they became accepted as "Scripture," were thought to be just as fully God's words as the words of the Old Testament, then any New Testament passage that speaks of some characteristic of God's words can properly be applied to all of the Old Testament and to as much of the New Testament as is accepted as Scripture. For to the New Testament authors, Scripture is God's words, and to say something about the character of God's speech is to say something about the character of Scripture.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, a closer look at (D' NZ within the world of biblical writers, gives strong evidence that inspiration was not a minor note in the Scriptures. Perhaps this explains why some of these writers and prophets, especially in the Old Testament, repeatedly declared, "Thus says the Lord, . . ." equating their words with God's words because they recognized that God was the ultimate source of their writings and utterances. However, one should be cautious not to personify here, that is, '*the Bible says, so God says,*' as though making reference to the entire canonical revelation.

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of Chicago Press, 1957, 166. In the New Testament (D' NZ means Holy Scripture exclusively. Scripture has divine origin.

<sup>5</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992, 447.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, eds. Donald Carson and John Woodbridge. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983, 49.

In addition, statements in the Bible such as (X(D" BJ" 4( D ÓJ4"For it is written," (literally, "*For it stands written*"), "the Scriptures say," "says the LORD/Lord," and "says God," must be construed as affirmations of the concept of biblical inspiration. Furthermore, a crucial point we bring to Barr's awareness is that the frequency of occurrence of a word, and in this case, (D" NZ, is not a criterion for the importance or dogmatic significance of a doctrine. For example, the word 'trinity' never occurs in the Bible anywhere, yet it stands for the explanation of an important teaching about who God is for us Christians.

On Barr's conclusion that the book of II Timothy is a "late and marginal document of the New Testament,"<sup>7</sup> we observe that this view stems from his understanding of the meaning and use of the word (D" NZ. Since we have argued that the New Testament understanding of (D" NZ (Holy Scripture)<sup>8</sup> refers to a well defined body of sacred writings, why then would Paul's second letter to Timothy be considered a "late and marginal document of the New Testament" by Barr and other scholars? What would be the rationale to warrant such a view of Holy Scripture? Indeed, the precise or relative date of II Timothy's authorship has no bearing on the validity of this book, especially with the understanding that it is part of (D" NZ. To view the book of II Timothy as a "late and marginal document of the New Testament" would be tantamount to undermining the uniqueness, validity and normativeness of (D" NZ,

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<sup>7</sup> James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*. London: SCM Press, 1980, 63.

<sup>8</sup> See George V. Wigram, *The Englishman's Greek Concordance*. London: Samuel Bagster, 1903, 124-125. See also Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 166.

especially in the light of the fact that (D" NZ "is nowhere used in the New Testament for non-biblical literature."<sup>9</sup> Actually, II Timothy as part of the epistolary literature has close ties, content wise, with I Timothy and Titus. Most of the issues or concerns raised in I Timothy reappear in II Timothy in a more personalized manner.<sup>10</sup> The main point we are advocating here is that Barr's 'late and marginal' view of II Timothy as a credible and authoritative document reflects an acceptance of the critical view of authorship and dating. Such a judgment is eisegetically drawn, that is, it is not extracted from within Scripture as such. This fundamentally undermines and weakens any attempts to espouse the validity of the critical view of authorship and dating in biblical exegesis. It is clear that Barr assumes and affirms this assumption that II Timothy is a 'late and marginal' document but without a strong exegetical basis or argument.

Furthermore, to accept any one of the epistles as a valid source or document of scripture and yet regard the other as "late and marginal" would be contrary to the New Testament understanding of B F" (D" N-2, ` B<, LFJ@H where we observe that all (D" NZ has its origin in God. Indeed, such a deduction would be highly unlikely in the light of biblical data. Furthermore, there is no biblical passage that encourages any mistrust of (D" NZ. Instead, people are encouraged to believe the

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<sup>9</sup> See Hübner, "' D" NZ,"in *Exegetical Dictionary*, 261.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon Fee, *New International Bible Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy Titus*, Peabody: Hendricksen Publishers, 1984, 12-13. II Timothy is Paul's appeal to Timothy to be loyal to God in the midst of a plethora of defections. Paul urges him to remain faithful to God. The Holy Scriptures are regarded as a significant measurement or standard of truth.

Scriptures in their entirety.<sup>11</sup> Every Scripture, the writer declares, is inspired by God. Although Paul had the Old Testament in mind here, the noun (D' NZ also has a broad reference. Paul could very well be emphasizing the usefulness of the Scriptures in all the individual passages which make up the whole, including what he was writing to the different churches.

Strictly, the bottom line of this attempt to view the book of II Timothy as a “late and marginal document” is its lack of textual support from within the Scriptures. The argument has no biblical ground. The conclusion is based on historical guesswork. Biblical inspiration is too critical a concept (or doctrine) to leave to such a deductive analysis. Biblical theology has to be rooted in textual analysis. This is what lies at the heart of the evangelical doctrine of biblical inspiration. It seeks to be informed by the biblical text(s) in its formulations of theological/biblical conclusions. We cannot afford to build an entire doctrine from one or two biblical texts. The whole counsel of God revelation is to be taught, (*“For I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole purpose of God,”*) Acts 20:27.

In the light of these considerations, Barr's proposition would not be a credible view of this biblical understanding of the origin of (D' NZ. Consequently, we have also argued and concluded that inspiration is indeed a significant theme in the Scriptures given the fact that the biblical writers and prophets equated their writings with the words of God. Therefore, a better understanding of the meaning of (D' NZ requires that

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<sup>11</sup> Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," 59.

we regard all references to (D" NZ in the Bible with the understanding that God is the ultimate source of Scripture, (D" NZ. Biblical references to (D" NZ are to be construed in the light of the unique origin of (D" NZ, that is, 2, ` B<, LFJ@H, 'breathed into by God.' Thus the doctrine of inspiration is not based solely on II Timothy 3:16. In fact, there are numerous other references and hints to inspiration in Scripture that favour its significance or dominance.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, we may conclude that the origin of the Scriptures is indeed a dominant theme in Scripture itself. Furthermore, the concept of biblical inspiration is based on careful exegesis of key passages that address the issue of the formation of canonical or normative literature.<sup>13</sup> Hence, we find Paul, the apostle, and other biblical writers of both Old and New Testament alike, in the habit of periodically reinforcing their utterances, writings, and messages with Scriptural citations to help God's people stay on the right path.

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<sup>12</sup> Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, ed. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990, 260-264. With its over 190 occurrences, (DVNT is in the top 20 most common verbs used in the New Testament. Furthermore, statements in the Bible like "Thus says the Lord," "It is written," "Scripture says," etc, all highlight the prominence of the doctrine of inspiration, Professor James I. Packer of Regent College, interview by author, 23 August 1996, Vancouver, Canada.

<sup>13</sup> Ex.34:27, II Sam. 23:1-2, Jer. 36, I Cor. 2:6-16, including II Tim. 3:16-17 and II Pet. 1:19-20. For a detailed discussion see Igou Louis Hodges, "Evangelical Definitions of Inspiration: Critiques and a Suggested Definition," in *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol.37 (March 1994) 102-104.

There is enough exegetical evidence within Scripture to conclude that what Paul wrote to Timothy in II Timothy 3:16-17 embodies a strong conviction found throughout the New Testament and held by the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles, and other biblical writers. In the case of Jesus Christ, there is no doubt that he appealed to the significance of inspiration of Scripture on several occasions: (a) when he resisted Satan's temptation (Matt:1-11, cf. Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13); and (b) when he engaged in theological and ethical controversies with some of the religious leaders of his time (Matt. 23:23, Matt. 5:17, 19).<sup>14</sup> Jesus also made it clear that his words and teaching were inspired in the sayings, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away," (Matt. 24:35, Mk 13:31, Lk. 21:33) and "But I say to you," (Matt. 5-7). To Paul, it is because "all Scripture is God-breathed" that the apostle states categorically that it is "useful." Thus to argue that inspiration is a minor and marginal note in Scripture would be a rather weak argument, both theologically and exegetically.

### **Proposition Two: Inspiration Rests in the Community of Faith**

Barr's second proposition is that inspiration must be understood as "the inspiration not of writers of books, but of the tradition of the believing community, out of which scripture was eventually formed."<sup>15</sup> We must be thankful to Barr for the depth of insight he brings to this

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<sup>14</sup> See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981, 955-982.

<sup>15</sup> Barr, *Scope*, 124.



issue. He explains:

Any account of inspiration must go beyond the 'writers,' a very limited circle of persons who committed the books to paper, and extend to the whole process of the production of scripture, including stages of oral tradition, editing and redaction, and transmission.<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, Barr is correct in asserting that the process of inspiration of the Scriptures involved the cooperation of the believing communities and not just isolated individuals. Some of our modern theologians have also assisted us to understand this reality:

The human authors of different biblical books have given shape to the biblical texts under the influence not only of God's Spirit, but also under the influence of their communities and cultures. They have shaped the biblical texts to reflect the beliefs and serve the needs of their religious communities.<sup>17</sup>

There was considerable research and consultation that went on within the believing community and that resulted in the production of the

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<sup>16</sup> Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 125.

<sup>17</sup> Brennan R. Hill, Paul Knitter, and William Madges, *Faith, Religion, and Theology: A Contemporary Introduction* "Approaches to Scripture and Tradition." Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990, 279.

Scriptures.<sup>18</sup> Spong is correct when he says that the Bible “did not drop from heaven in a complete and final form, written in Elizabethan English.”<sup>19</sup>

However, although Barr rightly points out that the inspiration process should include the entire communal efforts that led to the final product, one must be careful to note that there is a clear distinction between the community's participation in the production process and proposing that inspiration rests within the community of faith. These two concepts are worlds apart. Inspiration cannot rest within the community of faith. Inspiration rests within the text, what is written. Although writing primarily about the Old Testament, Sailhamer's canonical approach to Scripture is worth noting. He asserts:

To say, with Paul, that the Old Testament is Scripture, is to acknowledge that it is written. It is a book or, rather, a collection of books. From a linguistic perspective we can say that the Old Testament is a text . . . A commitment to an understanding of the Old Testament as Scripture, then, implies an exegetical method and biblical theology that is a direct function of the meaning of a text.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, Barr's proposition that inspiration rests within the tradition of

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<sup>18</sup> See also Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984, 64. "Inspiration cannot be reserved for the final redactor but ought to be seen as occurring over a long time as a charism of the people of God. God was at work in the community to produce a normative text for the community to serve as its constitution."

<sup>19</sup> John Shelby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991, 43.

<sup>20</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, 43.

the believing community would be unlikely. In fact, we have already established that II Timothy 3:16, B F" (D" N- 2, ` B<, LFJ@H . . . , declares that it is the text, the Scripture, that is inspired, and not the tradition of the believing community. In a word, inspiration rests within the written (D" NZ (scripture) not in the tradition or people who committed the Scriptures on paper as a written document. To conclude, like Barr, that "inspiration" applies to the tradition of the believing community instead of the text would be a disappointing oversight of the issue under consideration.

Thus, Barr does not reflect the Bible's view of itself when he says that inspiration rests with the community of faith. The Bible's view of itself seems to be that people, individually as well as collectively, were objects of the inspirational process (II Peter 1:20-21) and that it was these people who produced or compiled the *inspired writings*. Barr, on the other hand, proposes a rather diffused and mediated concept of inspiration, in which inspiration is coextensive with the entire, vast community of faith, over thousands of years (most of whom produced no writings at all), and he concludes that this is the primary locus of inspiration. He overlooks the fact that the biblical writers point the reader(s) to Scripture as the locus of God's revelation.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, in a less direct sense, he says that those who synthesized the community's tradition began to write it down. It is apparent that Barr is willing to apply the term "inspiration" to these people as well, but in a more removed way. The bottom line in Barr's second proposition is that,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 42.

ultimately, the Bible is the product of a long process of formation and revision of the traditions of the community of faith. Therefore, since traditions came before Scriptures, and Scriptures came before the Bible, inspiration is to be viewed as being within the tradition of these different communities of faith. Here, Barr is concerned about the *other writings*, also "inspired," which were not accepted as part of the canon of Holy Scripture. This is one reason Barr advances the notion that some of these writings came to be favoured and are also "inspired" indeed, even today they produce contemporary effects that can be properly called "inspiration." This is a totally different subject altogether. We shall address this issue later under the biblical authority section.

We have established that the doctrine of inspiration, as indicated from within the Scriptures, rests in the written text, the Bible. Furthermore, the only explicit biblical reference to inspiration, II Timothy 3:16, declares that it is (D" NZ, Scripture, that is inspired, not the writers or the tradition of the believing community. Therefore, we object to Barr's proposition that inspiration be viewed as applying to the tradition of the believing community that produced the Scriptures. Obviously, the process of inspiration extends to that whole divine activity that accompanied the entire preparation and production of the Scriptures. Therefore, we must admit, however, that the Scriptures, in a sense, are a product of the believing community. Barr is correct when he says:

If there is inspiration at all, then it must extend over the entire process of production that led to the final text. Inspiration therefore must attach not to a small number of exceptional persons like St. Matthew or St. Paul: it must extend over a

large number of anonymous persons, so much so that it must be considered to belong more to the community as a whole than to a group of quite exceptional persons who through unique inspiration 'gave' the scriptures to the community. In this sense scripture emerged from the community: it was a product of the church.<sup>22</sup>

We can only speculate how the Spirit of God was involved and how he worked alongside the biblical authors and the communities of faith in this creative literary production. However, we should be prudent enough to see beyond these circumstances and conclude with certainty that the spotlight is on the finished product, that is, *the text* (Scripture) is inspired. The two key passages on the doctrine of inspiration, namely, II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21, which we have analysed in the preceding chapter, have given us an exegetical basis to argue for the unique origin of the Scriptures. The point we are advocating here is for the placement of a clear distinction between the process of inspiration and the final product of that process. This distinction between the process of inspiration and the final text or product is significant because it is the completed text that (X(D" BJ" 4( DÓJ4 'stands written,' as authoritative.

### **Proposition Three: Inspiration Includes the Contemporary Effects of Scripture**

Barr's third proposition about inspiration is that "the Bible is the word of God as and when the divine Spirit breathes through it."<sup>23</sup> In other

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<sup>22</sup> Barr, James. *The Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 126.

words, the Bible becomes the word of God for us at some particular point when the Holy Spirit causes us to understand it. Goldingay is correct when he sketches out Barr's view of inspiration of Scripture in reference to its contemporary effects:

My conviction about the inspiration of scripture derives experientially from the impression it has made and makes on me. This experience meshes with what I discover to be the attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament scriptures, which (because it is his) ought to commend itself also even to those who have not (yet) been grasped experientially by scripture in this way. At the same time, I also discover from the scriptures themselves that they were produced through a fully human process, apparently by similar means as other human works. I also find in them some recognition that their humanity and historicity meant that they were not at every point saying the highest thing that could ever be said. But nevertheless the Bible is exactly what its divine author willed it to be; and it is exactly what its human authors willed it to be. Because the scriptures came into existence through such a historical, human process I shall investigate their meaning by similar means to the ones I apply to other literature. But because they also came into existence by the providence of God, I shall do so listening with special expectancy of and openness to hearing what God was saying in those historical situations - and therefore what he may be saying in mine.<sup>24</sup>

According to Barr, this process of the Scriptures coming alive is an extension of the concept of biblical inspiration. He explains:

Inspiration is this divine breathing into and through scripture. Inspiration does not refer to the intrinsic character of the Bible as a static entity or quality, nor does it refer primarily to the origin of scripture. It is attached not so much to the *origin* of

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<sup>24</sup> John Goldingay, "James Barr on Fundamentalism," *Churchman* 91 (October 1977): 301.

scripture, to the time when the words were first formed or written down, but to its effectiveness in a spiritual sense.<sup>25</sup>

Orthodox theology has always recognized that when we read the Bible obediently under the guidance of the Holy Spirit there is a personal apprehension of its truth along with an inner response to that truth that motivates, encourages, enlightens, uplifts, rebukes, or challenges us.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, orthodox theologians, however, have traditionally referred to this as "illumination" rather than inspiration.<sup>27</sup> They have decided to use a different word because they believe that the process is fundamentally different. By contrast, inspiration has been construed by orthodox theologians as that process through which God used human authors to produce a text, the Bible, that faithfully speaks His thoughts to mankind. One key characteristic of this process of inspiration, according to orthodox theologians, has been that it produced and preserved a text with very high degrees of reliability.<sup>28</sup> No such claim is made for

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<sup>25</sup> Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 126.

<sup>26</sup> See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, 874.

<sup>27</sup> R.C. Sproul, "The Internal Testimony of the Holy Scripture" in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 337. See also René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans. Helen I. Needham (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 199.

<sup>28</sup> See James I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 90. Packer says, "But faith in the consistency of God warrants an attitude of confidence that the text is sufficiently trustworthy not to lead us astray. If God gave the Scriptures for practical purpose - to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Christ - it is a safe inference that He never permitted them to become so corrupted that they can no longer fulfil it. It is noteworthy that the New Testament men did not hesitate to trust the words of the Old Testament as they had it, as a reliable indication of the mind of God."

illumination. Illumination does not operate to ensure error free transmission of the text. Therefore, to apply the term "inspiration" to the contemporary effects of the Scriptures upon the reader would be a theologically incorrect use of this unique term. Indeed, illumination and inspiration are fundamentally distinct processes. Therefore, inspiration cannot be theologically applied to contemporary effects of Scripture.

Barr's proposition and subsequent argument flow out of his decision not to recognize and accept the fact that it is the text, (D' NZ, that is inspired. Obviously, this theological decision leads to various interpretive nuances which reflect his presuppositions. The Scriptures stand as God's word ((X(D' BJ" 4 ( D ÓJ4, literally, 'For it stands written') whether we read/understand them or not. There is a qualitative emphasis in the biblical understanding of (D' NZ.<sup>29</sup> God does not say anything that goes out of date. His word is always relevant to all people at all times. Hence, Paul uses these adjectives, 2, `B<, LFJ@H 6" Â éNX84ı@H to display that the usefulness of Scripture rests in its being God-breathed. Our task as students of the Bible is to attempt to interpret (exegete) it, counting on God to guide us through his Spirit. However, to equate contemporary hermeneutics and exegesis to inspiration would not fit the New Testament understanding and use of the term "inspiration."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 281.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. *New American Commentary: 1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, Vol. 34. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 236. "The idea the term presents is that God has breathed his character into Scripture so that it is inherently inspired. . . . The Scriptures owe their origin and distinctiveness to God himself. This is the abiding character of Scripture."



The word  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$  conveys a special meaning of how the Scriptures came into being. Therefore, to make its meaning tantamount to contemporary effects of Scripture would be a misnomer. Contrary to Barr's position, we believe that inspiration of Scripture implies an intrinsic resultant character and quality of the Scriptures. The usefulness of Scripture is based on its unique origin,  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$  "God-breathed."<sup>31</sup> The concept of biblical inspiration communicates a meaning far beyond functional significance. Therefore, to reduce the meaning of  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$  to the level of contemporary effects of scripture does not fit the technical use of  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$  in the New Testament.

Based on these considerations, we conclude that Barr's proposition that inspiration includes the contemporary effects of Scripture is deficient. The concept of biblical inspiration, at least from its usage in II Timothy 3:16, means that Scripture is "breathed out by God"<sup>32</sup> as it stands in its final composition. Timothy was referring to an established body of Holy Scripture. We have already established from the syntax of the II Timothy 3:16 that  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$  is predicating something of this (D' NZ,<sup>33</sup> a recognized body of Holy Scripture.  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$  predicates or attributes a quality or characteristic to (D' NZ. Therefore, contrary to

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<sup>31</sup> Others have also defined inspiration as the "divine activity accompanying the preparation and production of the Scriptures," Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, 63.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin, B. Warfield. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. (New York: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), 133. See also James I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 25.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 118.

Barr, we are arguing against the use of *2, ` B<, LFJ@H* to refer to contemporary effects of Scripture because that would not fit its technical usage. The contemporary effects of the Scriptures are reflective of their divine origination. Indeed, there is a vast world of difference between inspiration as the process that produced (D' NZ and illumination as the process through which the Spirit of God applies truth to the believer.<sup>34</sup> Ryrie clarifies the difference between these two concepts:

Specifically, the doctrine of illumination relates to that ministry of the Holy Spirit that helps the believer understand the truth of Scripture. In relation to the Bible, the doctrine of revelation relates to the unveiling of truth in the material of the Scriptures; inspiration concerns the method by which the Holy Spirit superintended the writing of Scripture; and illumination refers to the ministry of the Spirit by which the meaning of Scripture is made clear to the believer.<sup>35</sup>

Here we see that there is always a danger of confusing inspiration and illumination. Consequently, we conclude that inspiration should be attached to that intrinsic quality or characteristic of the Scriptures in their final form since II Timothy 3:16 declares that B F" (D" N– 2, ` B<, LFJ@H. . . “all Scripture is God-breathed. . . .” The emphasis on the final form of Scripture is significant because it focuses on the ultimate product of the inspiration process, that is, the Scriptures in their canonical composition. Such a recognition is crucial for it challenges the curious

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<sup>34</sup> For further discussion see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 256-258.

<sup>35</sup> Charles C. Ryrie. “Illumination” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 544-545.

eisegesis of the likes of Professor Canaan Banana<sup>36</sup> and others who like to entertain the thought of re-writing the Bible with the hope of ‘trying to make the Bible relevant’ to the contemporary reader. Such an approach fails to respect the intrinsic authority of Holy Scripture. It also deprives the reader of the authorial intent, thus leading the reader away from biblical truth. Furthermore, this hermeneutical approach purports to make Scripture a text for all academic disciplines. Therefore, it is absolutely important to realize that the Bible is the Word of God, whether we understand a given text or not. It does not become the Word of God at some point when the divine Spirit breathes through it. The resultant origin of Scripture has everything to do with the characteristic of Scripture as a whole.

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<sup>36</sup> See Isabel Mukonyora, James L. Cox, and Frans J. Verstraelen, ed. *“Rewriting” the Bible: the Real Issues - Perspectives from within Biblical and Religious Studies in Zimbabwe*. (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1993), 17-31. In his “The Case for a New Bible,” Prof. Banana argues for rewriting the Bible (*a Bible*) that would reflect current voices of the people of the “third” world testifying God’s revelation and presence in their lives.

### **Proposition Four: Inspiration Means Scripture is Inspiring**

Barr's fourth proposition is that inspiration means that Scripture is inspiring,<sup>37</sup> a view he has adopted from William J. Abraham.<sup>38</sup> Although this proposition sounds very much like the previous third proposition which says that inspiration includes the contemporary effects of Scripture, the emphasis of this fourth proposition is quite different. From the analogy of the *inspiring teacher*,<sup>39</sup> Barr attempts to establish an understanding of the doctrine of inspiration. Barr elucidates this proposition:

This inspiration will vary with the temperament and ability of the students, and their natural abilities will be expressed in the different degrees in which they respond to this inspiration. Inspiration is not something done independently of all the other acts performed by the teacher: similarly, God's inspiring makes sense only as part of the vast variety of acts that he carries out. Inspiration in this sense makes sure that the students who are inspired receive from their teacher all the *essentials* of their subject, along with the atmosphere in which it has to be seen and the wider implications which it carries for life. But even the most inspiring teacher

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<sup>37</sup> Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 128.

<sup>38</sup> William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture*. Oxford: University Press, 1981.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Here, Barr is propagating the same concept of biblical inspiration advocated by William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: University Press, 1981), 59-69. Surprisingly, in his critical review of Abraham's book, especially on this view of inspiration, in *The Journal of Theological Studies* vol. 34 (October 1983): 370-76, Barr convincingly shows that this analogy has theological difficulties inconsistent with the biblical etymology of the term "God-breathed." But because Barr's use of the term "inspiration" is very broad, he recommends that one might wish to embrace such a view of biblical inspiration if it seems useful to one's understanding of inspiration. In actual fact, Barr is using the same term "inspiration" but with a totally different meaning from its biblical understanding.

does not succeed in ensuring that each and every student writes only a perfect answer to every question in the examination. Moreover, inspiration in this sense does not suddenly dry up and cease: it can continue after the original instruction has come to an end. This way of thinking may prove helpful to many.<sup>40</sup>

In the process of trying to clarify the biblical concept of inspiration, Barr offers, a rather vague definition of inspiration. The analogy of the *inspiring teacher* leaves a lot to be desired. Barr's emphasis in this proposition is creativity of the human writers of Scripture. We must hasten to give Barr a score on this point. Although we are not exactly clear as to how the Spirit of God interacted with the human authors, we have ample evidence from within Scripture to embrace the conviction that the Bible authors were not nothing more than mere instruments used by God. Any failure to recognize that their human perceptions, literary skills, and speculations affected the resultant shape of the biblical texts and influenced how they committed Scripture on paper would be a painful oversight. Evidently, we can confidently accept the fact that "the insights and values contained in the Bible are not simply the creation of human beings, but are the expression of human beings under the influence of God's spirit."<sup>41</sup> In other words, we ought to recognize as well as embrace the reality that biblical inspiration is a polymorphous concept involving a variety of divine and human activities. Although there is this correlation of God's purpose and his involvement with the human mind in the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 128-129.

<sup>41</sup> Brennan R. Hill, Paul Knitter, and William Madges, *Faith, Religion and Theology: A Contemporary Introduction*. Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990, 279.

inspiration process, we have argued and maintained that the final product, that is, the written (D' NZ (Scripture) should be recognized as God's authoritative Word. Our key phrase, B F" (D' N- 2, ` B<, LFJ@H gives us the biblical foundation to argue for this theological conclusion.

However, a closer look at Barr's fourth proposition shows that his theological understanding of biblical inspiration is rather vague and misleading. This analogy fails to represent and bolster adequately the purposes for which it is intended. The following points will elucidate our reasons for not embracing Barr's fourth proposition derived from the analogy of *the inspiring teacher*. There are three theological difficulties which this analogy creates.

First, the analogy is so detached from the scriptural divine-human context that the term 2, ` B<, LFJ@H has been reduced to a purely human phenomenon. We have observed and established already that the biblical understanding of inspiration declares that the Scriptures, although co-authored (God and human beings), have a divine origin. They are God's product in the final analysis.<sup>42</sup> 2, ` B<, LFJ@H is a special theological term that denotes God's active involvement in the community of faith in the production of Scripture. This divine involvement rendered the final product, the written (D' NZ (Scripture), a true representation of what God wanted committed on paper. Unfortunately, the analogy of *the inspiring teacher* fails to capture and present this essential biblical understanding of 2, ` B<, LFJ@H inspiration. Therefore, to try to equate the biblical

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<sup>42</sup> For further discussion see Fee, *NIBC: 2 Timothy*, 279; Warfield, *Inspiration*, 133; and Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," 39.

concept of inspiration to the student-teacher relationship drains 2, `B<, LFJ@H of its scriptural and theological significance because it makes the student (the biblical author) take full responsibility of the final product. Such a notion does not express the resultant origin of Scripture, that is, God-breathed. II Timothy 3:16 declares that B F" (D" N- 2, `B<, LFJ@H “all Scripture is God-breathed,” a view that is congruent with the biblical understanding of 2, `B<, LFJ@H

Second, the analogy of the *inspiring teacher* is flawed since it implies that God inspires (inspired) the writers. This view does not fit the understanding intended by Paul in II Timothy 3:16 where we have established that B F" (D" N- 2, `B<, LFJ@H. . . means that it is the text that is inspired. II Timothy 3:16 puts the spot-light on the written text. Nowhere in Scripture do we read of the biblical authors as being inspired. The text under consideration is emphatic, B F" (D" N- 2, `B<, LFJ@H. . . “all Scripture is God-breathed . . .” and one needs not read into or insinuate notions not raised by the text if we are careful exegetes.

Third, this analogy suggests that there are various degrees of inspiration depending on the temperament and creativity of the one being inspired. Two points are worth noting here. According to Barr, (1) The teacher is not really responsible for the final product since the student's final document reflects the degree of inspiration that he received. (2) The reader of the final document (product) can determine the authenticity and reliability of some parts of the final document especially those that do not seem to fit or reflect the character of the *inspirer*.

This proposition that biblical inspiration means that scripture is

"inspiring" is a deficient view because it overlooks, if not ignores, the fact that the divine activity is intentional,<sup>43</sup> a concept that really makes biblical inspiration a unique phenomenon. Furthermore, the "inspiring" notion also intimates that God is not ultimately responsible for the final product since the capacity of the writer reflects his or her ingenuity. Barr's attempt to offer a better understanding of the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture from an analogy rather than from biblical data lacks convincing textual evidence. His extrapolation of truth from an analogy here creates theological inconsistencies.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the Greek term  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$  does not mean *inspiring* at all. Scripture is inspiring, perhaps, because of its divine origin, but technically, in its biblical meaning  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$  should be understood as referring to both the divine and human process by which Scripture came into being. By this we mean that God influenced and guided the human authors (including the believing communities) who gave shape to the biblical texts so that the final product was according to God's requisite.  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$  means much more than inspiring. We must realize that  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$  does not stand on its own for it points to a final product. It actually highlights that (D'NZ has a resultant God-breathed origin. Commenting on the biblical understanding of  $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$  in II Timothy 3:16, Lea and Griffin are correct when they maintain that "Paul was not asserting that the Scriptures are inspiring in

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<sup>43</sup> For further reading see Donald A. Carson, "Three Books on the Bible: A Critical Review," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies* 26 (3 September 1983): 339-340.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 353. Carson is absolutely correct when he concludes that ". . . in some measure Barr has not discerned any difference between, on the one hand, inspiration and spirituality, and on the other, the thrill of intellectual innovation and formulation."



that they breathe information about God into us, even though the statement is true."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the key point in this text is that "the Scriptures owe their origin and distinctiveness to God himself."<sup>46</sup> The spotlight in II Timothy 3:16 is on the divine origin of Scripture. In other words, the usefulness of Scripture stems out of its divine origin.

### **A Critique of Barr's Hermeneutical Principles**

In chapter two we observed two principles Barr advances about the Scriptures: (1) scripture is a product of the believing community; and (2) inspiration does not guarantee that the Bible is an inerrant book. These two principles have profound theological implications on how Barr views and interprets the Scriptures. Why does Barr advance these principles about the Scriptures? What implications do these principles have on our perspective and/or interpretation of the Scriptures?

#### **Principle One: Scripture is a Product of the Community**

The key issue related to this principle concerns the origin (source) of scripture. Barr explains:

As we know today, the Bible is the product of a long process of formation and revision of *traditions*. The traditions were the memories and the instructions which were passed down in various authoritative channels: circles of prophets and

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<sup>45</sup> Lea and Griffin, *2 Timothy*, 236.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

storytellers, of priests, of wise men, of apostles and men who had been with Jesus. These traditions were the traditions of the people of God, both in its form as Israel and in its form as the church of Jesus Christ. The Bible, the written documents, forms the final precipitate from this long fluid state of tradition. Gradually the spoken traditions crystallized into a particular form, the processes of editing, compiling and redaction drew towards a close, books came to be formed, and these were holy scriptures. Traditions came before scriptures, and scriptures came before the Bible: for 'the Bible' implies a fixed and closed collection, and this was not reached until a very late stage when the so-called 'canon' of scripture was drawn up.<sup>47</sup>

The fundamental category shaping Barr's thought and view of biblical inspiration is that of the community of belief. The highest point of reference for him is the community. The community generates, out of its own process, the Bible as an end product. Evidently, the community determines the meaning of the Bible. In other words, according to Barr, the periphery of the community, whatever its bounds, is identical with the hermeneutical circle which mediates all our understanding of the Bible. In one sense, Barr is correct when he says that "scripture emerged from the tradition of the people of God."<sup>48</sup> No one would dispute that the Bible did not fall out of heaven from God to mankind as a prepackaged document. It had an origin or author(s). The human authors sometimes had to engage in research, interaction with existing sources, and editing documents in their production of the Bible into a final document. Luke's Gospel is a good example, "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to

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<sup>47</sup> Barr, *Scope*, 58.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 60

write an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught,” (1:3-4). Indeed, there is an anthropological element in the origin of the Bible. However, such an understanding of how Scripture came into being does not (and should not) interfere with the fact that Scripture, be it in its original documents as well as in the final canonical composition as we have it today, is *θεόπνευστος* "God-breathed." Sailhamer's comments are worth noting here although he is talking specifically about the Torah (the Pentateuch). What he says is also true of the New Testament. He observes:

That the Bible has both a divine and a human origin does not mean that it has both a divine and a human purpose or intention. It does not mean that though the human authors may have meant one thing, God intended another. When the Bible speaks about its own origin as "inspired" Scripture (2Ti 3:16), it does not pit its human authors against its divine Author. On the contrary, its view is that the human authors were so moved by God to write that what they wrote was what God intended. As Peter puts it, "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2Pe 1:21).<sup>49</sup>

However, Barr's view of Scripture as a product of the believing community seems to go beyond this obvious reality. He does not regard the process that led to the production of the Scriptures as a totally unique and special act of God different from how God communicates with people today.<sup>50</sup> In addition, Barr argues that "the men of the Bible had no Bible:

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<sup>49</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

there was no Bible in the biblical period."<sup>51</sup> According to Barr, the Bible is more of a community's address to God than God's address to man.<sup>52</sup> Again, Barr scores a significant point here. Anyone who reads the Psalms or Habakkuk chapter one, for example, does not need to conduct a thorough exegetical analysis to determine that the Bible is mostly the community of believers addressing God and not vice versa. Psalm 13 is a good example:

How long will you forget me, O Jehovah? Forever? Until when will you hide your face from me? How long shall I set counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart every day; how long shall my foe be lifted up over me? Look! Answer me, O Jehovah, my God! Make my eyes gleam, lest I sleep the death; lest my enemy say, I have overcome him and my foes rejoice when I am shaken. But I have trusted in your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to Jehovah, because He has rewarded me. (*Interlinear, Hebrew-English*)

Apparently, Barr carries this point beyond this obvious realm. Strictly, the fundamental issue Barr raises in this first principle concerns authority: Does Scripture have authority over the believing community or vice versa? Barr simply denies that biblical authority is a function of its

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 56. Here, Barr overlooks the fact that the authors of the Bible had pieces or parts of God's written revelation which God had already given them. "In the OT prophets are marked off by their unswerving assurance that they were spokesmen for the living God," Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 147.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 114-115. "Certainly it *contained* various speeches made to the community by representatives of God such as the prophets, who formed in a way the paradigm case for the idea of a Word of God addressed to the hearing people; and indeed in narrative passages it cited speeches literally made by God himself, or so depicted. But much of it, equally, was the community's address to God," 114.

inspiration. Perhaps this is one reason he suggests that the traditional model order of "God ÷ revelation ÷ scripture ÷ church" ought to be superseded by "God ÷ people ÷ tradition ÷ scripture."<sup>53</sup>

Barr's argument flows out of his decision to regard (D' NZ as not having the absolute divine origination and special characteristics of God himself. New Testament writers understood that what the Scriptures say, God says. The Scriptures were viewed as God's words in written form.<sup>54</sup> Although the Scriptures, in one sense, came out of the believing community, a proper understanding of 2, ` B<, LFJ@H as we have established, should lead us to view God as the ultimate source of (D' NZ, Scripture. Moreover, in the light of the concept of the movement "from eyewitnesses to ear-witnesses to written-witnesses,"<sup>55</sup> it seems evident that God and his word were the basis for people's faith. The object of the people's faith was God as taught by the Scriptures.

Therefore, Barr's principle that the Scriptures be regarded as a product of the believing community is deficient because it fails to go even further and extend to the conclusion that God is the ultimate source of the Scriptures. In a word, Barr's first principle restricts the Bible to a mere human document, formulated by human beings. Such a view contradicts clearly the understanding portrayed by New Testament authors.<sup>56</sup> We

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>54</sup> Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," 39.

<sup>55</sup> Carson, "Books on the Bible," 351.

<sup>56</sup> See Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," 39. For a detailed discussion on Scripture's view of itself, see Sinclair B. Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutics*. ed. Harvie M. Conn. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988, 50-54.

have established that a proper understanding of the origin of the Scriptures led the biblical writers to understand that God was the ultimate author of their writings. In that case, Barr's principle falls short of what the Scriptures say about their resultant nature and origin.

### **Principle Two: Inspiration Does Not Guarantee Inerrancy**

We have observed that Barr's second principle is that inspiration does not guarantee that the Bible is an inerrant book. He argues that the Bible contains factual errors<sup>57</sup> therefore, to impute inerrancy to the Bible would be a gross theological blunder.<sup>58</sup> While orthodox theologians have always differed as to just what the process really involved,<sup>59</sup> they have always agreed that the result of the inspiration process was a totally trustworthy text, that it can be entirely believed in every aspect. Therefore, to conclude that "the Bible is not an inerrant book,"<sup>60</sup> that "any realistic approach to the subject must begin by accepting that the Bible

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<sup>57</sup> Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 124-125.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>59</sup> See Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 206-7. There are at least five major theories of biblical inspiration discussed in most traditional theology textbooks: intuition, illumination, dynamic, verbal, and dictation. For further recent discussion on the orthodox understanding of the process of inspiration, see Louis Igou Hodges, "Evangelical Definitions of Inspiration: Critiques and a Suggested Definition," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 37 (March 1994): 99-114. Hodges presents a very comprehensive list of twenty nine different definitions of inspiration proposed by evangelical theologians.

<sup>60</sup> Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 124.

does contain some factual error,"<sup>61</sup> and that God would inspire a Bible with errors in it so that he might communicate with mankind,<sup>62</sup> raises fundamental theological questions contrary to the evangelical position. The key issue to some scholars becomes: How can the Bible be a substantially reliable document when it is not absolutely true to fact? How does God inspire an erroneous document which remains as our guide to faith in Him? Indeed, these are perennial issues that have sparked countless debates in theological discussions with a view to explaining some of these "factual errors or difficulties," or "alleged (or seemingly) factual discrepancies"<sup>63</sup> as others have attempted to call them.

The terms "inerrancy" and "infallibility" - with reference to the Scriptures, have been debated for aeons. The evangelical understanding of these terms leads to the conclusion that the Bible is free from all error because God's Word, being God-breathed, cannot be errant. God cannot lie.<sup>64</sup> However, there are conceptual difficulties embedded in this understanding of biblical inerrancy.<sup>65</sup> Other evangelical scholars have

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Barr, *Modern World*, 16.

<sup>63</sup> This is a more acceptable phraseology to those who do not prefer an outright admission of errors in the Bible.

<sup>64</sup> This is not a new view at all. For a detailed discussion, see Pache, *Inspiration*, 120-140, especially 121. See also pp. 233-247.

<sup>65</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Kern Robert Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 97-103. Trembath highlights three difficulties with the traditional inerrancy view: (1) It suggests that only the biblical author is inspired and that, as an active agent, he was directly changed by God so as not to err; (2) It identifies the Bible with God, or the sign with thing signified; and (3) It fails to deal convincingly with the purported errors in the Bible and that the possible existence of errors in the Bible nullifies the authority of the Bible as God's Word.

sought to define inerrancy in terms of biblical truth:

Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.<sup>66</sup>

Over the years evangelical scholars have convincingly argued for biblical inerrancy. Numerous books have been written to define and clarify the evangelical understanding of inerrancy.<sup>67</sup> In one sense, the issue of biblical inerrancy, among other tenets, has led to the establishment of two major theological camps, namely, evangelicalism and liberalism.<sup>68</sup> Some evangelicals have always insisted on inerrancy under the *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) principle. Historically, a key inspiration to this view has been the articles of The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics and Inerrancy: “We affirm that the normative authority of Holy Scripture is the authority of God Himself, and is attested by Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. We deny the legitimacy of separating the authority of Christ from the authority of Scripture, or of opposing the one to the other.”<sup>69</sup> The article continues:

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<sup>66</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy" in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1980), 294.

<sup>67</sup> The bottom line in the evangelical understanding of biblical inerrancy is that "the Bible is all true," Feinberg, "Meaning of Inerrancy," 304.

<sup>68</sup> See Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 303-21.

<sup>69</sup> The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. Oakland, California, 1983, 45. These statements were adopted by 240 (out of a total of 268) evangelical theologians and church leaders in October 1973 at a summit meeting held near The Chicago



We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God. We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the church, tradition, or any other human source. We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the church is subordinate to that of Scripture. We deny that church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater or equal to the authority of the Bible. We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God. We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the response of men for its validity.<sup>70</sup>

In addition, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1.2) lists the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as “all . . . given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.”<sup>71</sup>

Usually there are three explanations attached to this principle: (1) inerrancy applies equally to all parts of Scripture as originally written (autographa); (2) inerrancy is intimately tied up with hermeneutics; and (3) inerrancy is related to Scripture's intention.<sup>72</sup> At best, the evangelical emphasis on biblical inerrancy purports that “it is impossible to sustain the *sola scriptura* principle without infallibility.”<sup>73</sup> Commenting on the theological significance and implications of inerrancy Pinnock says that a

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>71</sup> J.D. Douglas, ed. *The New Bible Dictionary*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962, 148.

<sup>72</sup> See Feinberg, "Meaning of Inerrancy," 296-297.

<sup>73</sup> Clark Pinnock, *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1967), 32.

"denial of it brings into serious jeopardy the entire epistemological base of Christianity."<sup>74</sup>

Considering that the purpose of Scripture is "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be proficient, having been equipped for every good work" (II Tim. 3:16b-17, *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, 1990), the normativeness of Scripture cannot be overlooked or minimized. Therefore, according to the evangelical understanding it becomes highly unlikely that God would give us Scripture that is errant or fallible. For the evangelical, a key advantage of insisting on biblical inerrancy is that Scripture becomes the Christian community's objective standard of truth because human beings are perverted by sin. Actually, biblical inerrancy is derived from both the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of God. The term "inerrancy" is not found in Scripture itself, and it may not be "from the list of preferred terminology for stating the evangelical doctrine of Scripture,"<sup>75</sup> but it surely conveys a biblical understanding of the nature, quality, and authority of Scripture. Thus, according to some evangelicals, inerrancy should be claimed and affirmed in the light of the quality of biblical truth.<sup>76</sup>

The fundamental reasons for inerrancy are presented as being biblical, historical, and epistemological in nature.<sup>77</sup> Biblically, the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Clark Pinnock, "Inspiration and Authority: A Truce Proposal," *The Other Side* (May-June, 1976), 61-65; quoted in Geisler, ed. *Inerrancy*, 293.

<sup>76</sup> See Feinberg, "Meaning of Inerrancy," 304.

<sup>77</sup> See Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, pp.142-143, for a detailed summary discussion on the arguments for biblical inerrancy..

argument is five-fold: (1) the Scriptures are the breath of God (II Tim. 3:16), which guarantees that they are without error; (2) as God's message (Deut. 13:1-5, 18:20-22), the Bible is absolutely truthful; (3) the Bible teaches its own authority (Matt. 5:17-20; Jn. 10:34-35), and this requires inerrancy; (4) Scripture uses Scripture, like in quotations - NT writers quoted the OT carefully, in ways that support inerrancy (Ps. 82:6; Gal. 3:16); and (5) since the Bible is from God and His character is behind it, it must be inerrant and infallible. Biblical inerrancy is believed by some to have been the view of the church throughout history. Inerrancy is understood to have been part of the corpus of the orthodox faith, and it was assumed rather than defended. Epistemologically, the Bible's contents are accepted as objects of knowledge without question. Inerrancy warrants the incorrigibility of every statement of Scripture. North American television evangelists like Falwell would agree with this view. He says, "The Bible is the inerrant . . . word of the living God. It is absolutely infallible, without error in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as well as in areas such as geography, science, history, etc."<sup>78</sup>

However, although the evangelicals have presented and defended their position for biblical inerrancy over the years, their arguments have not gone without challenge. Other scholars, including James Barr, have equally responded to each of the arguments presented by evangelical scholarship.<sup>79</sup> (1) The epistemological argument: a single error in the Bible does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the entire Bible

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<sup>78</sup> Falwell, Jerry. *Finding Inner Peace and Strength*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982, 126-127.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, pp. 144-145.

contains no truth. (2) The historical argument: total inerrancy of the Bible is an innovation of nineteenth century theologians. Throughout the centuries the church believed in the authority of the Scriptures but not in total inerrancy of the Scriptures. (3) The biblical argument: the most common objection to this argument is that the Scriptures are silent regarding their own inerrancy. The Bible nowhere declares “all Scripture is *inerrant*” as in the case of II Timothy 3:16-17 where it declares “all Scripture is *God-breathed*.” Since the corpus of this research is exegetical in nature, that is, attempting to arrive at theological conclusions through exegetical or textual analysis, the biblical argument is crucial to our discussion. We shall return to this important point shortly. First, we need to see what others have done in attempt to establish the exegetical evidence for biblical inerrancy from the Scriptures. Second, we need to observe their evidence before arriving at any theological conclusions.

The evangelical scholarship’s doctrine of biblical inerrancy is believed to be built on at least five scriptural phenomena:<sup>80</sup> (1) the biblical teaching on inspiration. This is based on theological implications from II Timothy 3:16. The conclusions from this text are: First, the emphasis is placed on the written text of Scripture, and not on the writer. Second, the Scriptures are regarded as “the very spirated breath of God,”[p.280]. Third, inspiration is applied to *all* and to *every* Scripture. (2) The biblical teaching concerning the accreditation of God’s message and messenger: this is based on the criteria set in the Bible on the close connection between the prophet and his message. Three elements are noted here, (a)

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<sup>80</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 277-287.

the prophet was to speak in the name of God; (b) the prophet was to speak only the truth; and (c) what the prophet spoke of had to be fulfilled. (3) The Bible's teaching concerning its own authority: from such texts as Matt. 5:17-20 and John 10:34,35, it is argued that Jesus Christ spoke of the unwavering authoritative nature of the Scriptures. (4) The way in which Scripture is used: the point made here is that there is textual evidence for Scripture using other Scriptures in bringing a point across. Sometimes these references to other Scriptures are done with precision, while at other times, the authors seem to be very imprecise in their quotations. Lastly, (5) The biblical teaching concerning the character of God: Scripture passages such as Num. 23:19, I Sam. 15:29, Titus 1:2, Heb. 6:18, Rom. 3:4, and John 17:17, show that God's character holy, pure, blameless, above reproach, et cetera. Thus, it is argued, if the Scriptures are from God (which they are), they cannot be fallible.

However, if we are to do justice to the key biblical texts (II Tim. 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21) we have analysed critically throughout this study, we see that there is no direct or indirect reference to inerrancy at all. It becomes obvious that there is no explicit exegetical evidence for the biblical inerrancy view held by some of the evangelical scholars in their treatment of the Scriptures. Such a view of Scripture is eisegetically induced from presuppositions about the nature of the Bible. Strictly, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is an inference stemming from the character of God and not from explicit textual treatment and analysis of the Scriptures. Such a theological conclusion is absolutely disappointing because it espouses presuppositions without scrutinizing the biblical data.

At least two biblical texts are worth noting at this juncture:

First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (II Peter 1:20-21, *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*)

For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. (I Cor. 2:11-13) [*The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*]

There seems to be a close connection between incarnation and inspiration. A closer look at the ministry of biblical prophets can help us to see this strong tie. Bible prophets represent an example of human instruments God used by the Holy Spirit to communicate his Word to other human beings. Moule, commenting on the relationship between inspiration and incarnation, makes a notable point when he observes:

Thus, the Christian prophet is, like pre-Christian Jewish prophets, controlled by the Spirit of God, but, in distinction from them, it is the Spirit mediated through Jesus Christ. And the function of Christian prophecy is not only to give expression to the witness of Jesus (Apostles and Evangelists and teachers also do this), but to put into words inspired insights into the will of God. The prophet is an interpreter of the mind of God because the Spirit of God is speaking through him and enabling

him to 'have the mind of Christ' (I Cor. 2:16).<sup>81</sup>

Moule continues:

Evidently, at Christian gatherings for worship and mutual edification, there would be some present who were recognized as having this prophetic gift—or, if all had it in some measure, these persons had it more frequently or more clearly. They would, on occasion, speak in God's name—probably specifying the right course of action in the face of some need or problem. But it is significant that they were not accepted blindly as final authorities: the rest of the congregation had to exercise their critical judgement.<sup>82</sup>

Actually, texts such as I John 4:1-3, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirit to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the anti-Christ, of which you have heard that it is already in the world," (*The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*) show that utterances made under inspiration were not taken as infallible. The need for testing the spirits was always there. Moule's conclusion is certainly worth noting when he says:

Whatever one may believe about the absolute and inerrant wisdom of God himself, it does not seem to be his way to override the fallible, human persons who try to hear and mediate his voice. Indeed, since the recipient is fallible and human, his reception of divine intimations is bound always to be subject to error and to

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<sup>81</sup> C.F.D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit*. Oxford: Mowbrays, 1978, 63.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

uncertainties of interpretation; and the same is true of his hearers.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, when Barr concludes that “any account of inspiration must therefore begin by accepting that inspiration does not guarantee inerrancy,”<sup>84</sup> he scores a significant point. We must painfully swallow our pride and accept this reality. It is a sign of true scholarship when one realizes his/her hermeneutical or exegetical fallacies and changes a position because available data requires that. We shall return to this crucial point in the following chapter. However, for the moment, it is essential for us to accept the fact we do not know everything about the doctrine of inspiration. Although God is the ultimate author of Scripture, the perceptions and speculations of the human authors significantly shaped the biblical text. There is no textual evidence in Scripture for God overtaking anyone in the moment or process of inspiration. In fact, in the Scriptures, we observe that the human authors were not attempting to reconstruct the notion of God but rather consciously allowing God to reveal himself in and through them as they wrote. In this study we are advocating that biblical inspiration means that the written text (the insights, experiences, and values contained or recorded in the Bible) is the creation and expression of human beings under the influence of God’s Spirit.<sup>85</sup> For it must be noted that God was actively involved in the communities of faith as well as in the individual experiences of all those who produced the Scriptures. Furthermore, we cannot claim biblical

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 125.

<sup>85</sup> Hill, Knitter, and Madges, *Faith, Religion, and Theology*, 279.



inerrancy (the notion of being free from error) in the historical and quasi-scientific references in the Bible. We need to be realistic. Indeed, the Bible is a divine revelation from God, but not a scientific textbook. Spong is correct when he comments:

The medical understanding among biblical writers was the common wisdom of their time and place, not remotely close to our understanding of medical science. Studies of plant life, animal life, and human life available in centuries past were primitive, to say the least. Concepts commonplace today in the world of physics, subatomic physics, astrophysics, and cosmology would have drawn Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, to say nothing of the author of the Book of Genesis, nothing except blank stares of incredulity.<sup>86</sup>

However, it is crucial that we bear in mind that the Scriptures' intent is never to mislead the reader. In other words, by not accepting biblical inerrancy we are not questioning the authority or reliability of the Scriptures. It is simply an acknowledgement of the fact that the process of inspiration has an anthropological ingredient, that is, it involved human beings who crafted the texts under the influence of God's spirit. For example: Who killed Goliath? Consider the following passages in answer to this question: I Samuel 17:50 "So *David* triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him." II Samuel 21:19 "In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, *Elhanan son of Jaare-Oregim* the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod." I Chronicles 20:5 "In another battle with the Philistines,

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<sup>86</sup> Spong, *Rescuing the Bible*, 25.

*Elhanan son of Jair* killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod."[*New International Version*]. There might not be agreement what we call this, *error, mistake, factual discrepancy, or alleged (or seemingly) factual error*, but we would all agree that something is not right in these historical records. What explanation do we offer here? Unfortunately, the western approach (Euro-centric approach) to doing theology claims that there ought to be a palatable explanation for everything. Perhaps now is the time for our dear western (Euro-centric) brothers and sisters to embrace some of the theological realities offered by our dear Afro-centric and/or Asia-centric theologians. The ability to accept and feel comfortable with ambiguity is

one such reality.<sup>87</sup> There is no room for settling for ambiguity or accepting “I don’t know,” as a logical answer to a question. We cannot claim to know everything about God or the Bible. Actually, these factual errors or discrepancies do not, and should not interfere with or nullify the reliability of the Bible as God’s authoritative Word. Indeed, inspiration does not guarantee inerrancy, not even of the original writings (*we do not have copies of the original manuscripts tucked away some place where we can retrieve them any time we need to prove a point*). The claims for infallibility, inerrancy, and perfection which are supposed to be attached to the Bible are not tenable. One can only conclude that a belief in biblical inerrancy is simply a sign that one is unaware of the vast areas of objective realities that are common knowledge to the people of this

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<sup>87</sup> Eschatology is another good example here. In the Euro-centric approach to theology, everything must fall into nice packages or well defined compartments. A person is expected to have a ‘crystallized’ position on when Christ will return because it is a mark of a well researched person. For a theologian to say “I don’t know when Christ will return, and I am comfortable with that,” would not be a well received theological position. Ambiguity is usually regarded as a weakness. This is not to show that the opposite view is better but simply to highlight some differences to doing theology, and point out that we need to learn from each other, especially concepts formulated from worldviews outside our own.

century. In fact, this view of the Bible leads to personal un-orthodoxy.<sup>88</sup> The danger of such an approach to the Scriptures is that it identifies the Bible with God himself while at the same time excluding any self-questioning to the source of their assertions about God. The Bible, God's Word, does not need to be perfect to be true. Actually, any criteria we choose to determine the Bible's perfection is an act of judgment. This is why we are rejecting such a view of the Bible. We are proposing that we seek in the Bible better views, ones which do not stumble over the fragile medium of Scripture, and confess humbly, simply, and honestly, in the face of a tenaciously anti-Christian world, that the Almighty God is indeed the LORD of all.

Thus Barr is correct when he concludes:

To impute inerrancy to the Bible is simply to mistake the sort of book it is. The Bible contains statements that are not factually accurate and statements that are discrepant with other biblical statements; and it contains, at least, theological assertions that differ in tendency and emphasis from others within the Bible. As

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<sup>88</sup> By contorting some biblical passages to conform with doctrines derived eisegetically, some 'evangelical' theologians have made some embarrassing claims. These theologians are not, mind you, uneducated or stupid people at all; they merely make embarrassing claims. Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976, is one such book. Commenting on the Bible Lindsell asserts, "This Word is free from error in its *original autographs*. . . (italics added). It is wholly trustworthy in matters of history and doctrine. . . . The authors of Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were preserved from making factual, historical, scientific, or other error," (pp.30-31). Here, Lindsell is declaring that the Bible avoids all forms of incorrectness in all its assertions. Such a theological conclusion has no textual or exegetical basis. These attempts, though well meaning, lead to a modicum of deception since they require the one making the claim to consent to what they know is not true, and they do so under the guise of putting God before human beings (*a judgment call on their part*). But they all in the same breath subject God and the Bible to their own human judgment.

has been said, no doctrine of inspiration is of any use if it does not take account of these realities, for they are the realities of the Bible itself. However, it should not be supposed that the errors and discrepancies of the Bible are in themselves so very important. They are important because they are a powerful indicator to what the Bible really is. But in themselves they are not so very important. It is fundamentalism that magnifies the importance of any possible or conceivable erroneous statement in the Bible, by arguing that the presence of any such statement would utterly destroy the reliability of the Bible and make it useless as a guide to faith.<sup>89</sup>

So we see in the Bible the anthropological evidence, and especially that God did not overtake the human authors in the inspiration process. However, it is quite apparent that God superintended the entire process every step of the way.

To sum up this section, Barr offers four propositions about his preferred view of biblical inspiration: (1) inspiration is a minor note in the Scripture; (2) inspiration applies to the tradition of the believing community that produced the Scriptures; (3) inspiration includes the contemporary effects of scripture; and (4) inspiration means that scripture is inspiring. There are at least four inherent theological/exegetical difficulties with Barr's propositions: (1) he has chosen to redefine the term "inspiration," giving it a very broad scope that can fit any definition one might choose to define inspiration; (2) he reduces the unique biblical process of inspiration to an ordinary on-going phenomenon which spills into present day biblical scholarship; (3) he fails to note that it is the text (the Scriptures) that is inspired; and (4) although these propositions are

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<sup>89</sup> Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 129.

philosophically persuasive, they lack convincing biblical or exegetical support. These propositions emanate from a misunderstanding of the biblical meaning of (D" NZ and 2, ` B<, LFJ@H This is evidenced by the key hermeneutical principle he makes about the Scriptures, namely, Scripture is the product of the believing community. We have established that, in one sense, there is truth in this principle provided we go as far as acknowledging that God is the ultimate source of B F" (D" NZ "all Scripture." The resultant origin of the Scriptures leads us to the realization that the Scriptures have authority over the believing community. In a word, the fact that the Scriptures rose out of the believing community does not in any way nullify the credibility and authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Why then does Barr offer these propositions about inspiration? Why does he present such a hermeneutical assumption about the Scriptures?

### **Implications of Barr's View of Biblical Inspiration**

Although we concede that our analytical conclusions are more pronounced and less nuanced than Barr's view, it is quite obvious that Barr is objecting to the authority of the Scriptures as the believing community's absolute authority in matters of doctrine and practice. We must remain fair to Barr. He does attribute authority to the Bible. However, he simply denies that the authority of the Bible is a resultant function of its inspiration. Two key points lead us to this conclusion about his view of biblical authority, which obviously reflects his preferred view

of biblical inspiration.

First, arguing from the nature of Jesus Christ, that is, he was both human and divine, Barr attempts to relate this to the nature of Scripture. He concludes:

It would suggest that scripture can be at one and the same time a completely human product, having all the weakness, the variability, the contingency, the historically-relatedness of the human, and yet at the same time be the Word of God, through which the eternal God communicates with us, and we with him.<sup>90</sup>

We have already established that there is an anthropological element in the origin of the Bible. The human authors' perceptions, creativity, and speculations significantly affected or influenced how they penned their thoughts under the Holy Spirit's guidance. Unfortunately, Barr's presupposition about the Bible, that is, the emphasis on the Bible as a product of the community of faith, reduces the Bible to a mere human record of people's experience of God's activity in their lives. In other words, in the final analysis, Barr views the Bible as containing not only God's word, but also human words. He fails to capture the fact that the theological and exegetical reality of Bible (Deuteronomy 2, 18, 19) calls for God as the ultimate source of the Scriptures. When all is said and done, we must come to the conclusion that the Bible is a special kind of book written specifically and precisely according to God's direction. According to Barr, "God *in some way* inspired the Bible,"<sup>91</sup> thus the Bible

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<sup>90</sup> Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 126.

<sup>91</sup> Barr, *Modern World*, 17. Italics mine.

becomes the word of God for us "as and when the divine Spirit breathes through it."<sup>92</sup> What Barr means in his assertion that the Bible can become the Word of God for us is that the text, the written (D' NZ, is not sufficient, though necessary, for us to come to a knowledge of God. Earlier, we also observed that Barr holds the view that the Bible's authority refers to its ability to interrogate or raise questions about what we think and the basis of our judgement.<sup>93</sup> Hence, he concludes that "the authority of the Bible does not operate inductively, that is, we do not derive from the Bible information that in itself authorizes or gives the foundation for such and such a doctrinal or ethical position."<sup>94</sup> Again, this stems from his misunderstanding and perception of the role of the community of faith. Indeed, the community of faith is central to all attempts at understanding the truth about Jesus Christ. Actually, it was in their time, their historical understanding, their conception of religion and expectation of the Messiah, their language, their socio-economic context, their geographic space, their political reality, and their world that God decided the "fulness of time" (Gal. 4:4) had arrived.

The normative character of the first Christians had to do with their proximity to Jesus Christ, and not some quality of mind, soul, or insight into God that they presumably possessed over and above what is possible for us. The exception to this are the apostles, and even in their case, they were chosen and crafted by the Holy Spirit not on account of, but rather in

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<sup>92</sup> Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 126.

<sup>93</sup> Barr, *Scope*, 62.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.



spite of themselves. It is crucial to realize that if we isolate the New Testament as an object or commodity delivered directly from God without respect for the frail human agents who deliver that word to us, then we are guilty of idolatry. Such an approach to Holy Scriptures illicitly proliferates the Bible's own view and claims for its nature and its use. Moreover, this can become idolatry since it also makes the Bible into something we can call absolute and perfect, which God alone is, and it also makes the Bible into something we can control.

So, the community of faith is ineluctable. It is most powerful when it is treated as transparent to itself in the world and before God, and not when it is treated reflexively, as though it had or could derive all that it needs from within itself. There are all sorts of effects and implications of the essential communal nature of Christian existence in our culture today, - a culture that is dominated by individualism, materialism, and competitiveness.

The Christian community is essential to the life of the individual. It is in the Christian community that believers are called to work, pray, sing, correct, and be corrected. Christ's promise "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it," (Matthew 16:18) means that the church is our refuge in a world of darkness. In the church we are able to be stewards of life in this kingdom of death and destruction, a characteristic of our modern culture. In the church we realize the fact that the earth and all its fullness belongs to the Almighty God, and not to IBM, Warner Bros., or any other of the powers that be.

Therefore, it is crucial that we realize that the church as the

community of belief, is always going to be a blend of wheat and tares, and is not a perfect replica of virtue, but is a place where sinners saved by grace, are loved and dignified through the penitence that grace nurtures. The community of faith stands over us in judgment and in wisdom, and is called to witness in the world. In all these, and who knows how many other ways, the community of belief is a necessity for faith. But, as against Barr, we are advocating that the community of faith authorizes only as it is authorized. In other words, the authority of the community of faith is manifest not in its rational dominance, even of itself, but in the courage and wisdom with which it preaches ‘the message of the cross which is foolishness . . .’ (I Cor. 1:18) in the face of a world addicted to success and simultaneously bereft of it.

The major point we are advancing, against Barr, is that, since the community of faith authorizes only as it is given authority of the one who promises to live within it, then the community cannot be understood from within itself. The community of faith cannot be understood as an anthropological possibility. It exists and is empowered by that God who in the very act of revealing himself also conceals his glory. God cannot and will not be mastered by us, but must be believed; believed not as generated from our possibilities, but as the real Presence, the Almighty God, whose will and purpose overtake ours, and bend them to his end; the kingdom of God on earth. This means, again, that we must have reference to the God who is real, who makes his will known to people in the Word, the Holy Scriptures. Thus, the authority of the written Word of God and the authority of the community of faith are not intrinsic to them; they are

always borrowed or have invested authority.<sup>95</sup> Thus the better model for understanding the nature of biblical authority is a relational model, that is, one in which several ingredients together are all irreducibly needed in a specific relationship if the health and harmony of the community of belief is to be realized. The issue of biblical authority shall be discussed in greater detail in the upcoming chapter.

In summary, however, Barr's view of biblical inspiration undermines the Bible's character as the final authority in matters of Christian faith and conduct. If the Scriptures cannot be our absolute standard of faith we are left with no normative criteria for judging faith. Since human beings are sinful by nature, it is expedient that there be an objective standard of truth outside of human beings themselves. Thus, the existence of a God-breathed body of literature becomes a reliable criterion for determining truth.

Second, a related implication of Barr's view of biblical inspiration is his conclusion that "the men of the Bible had no Bible: there was no Bible in biblical period."<sup>96</sup> Basically, Barr is undermining the authority of Scripture over the community of faith. As a result, we saw that he proposes a newer way to indicate his preferred view of biblical authority:

Instead of the traditional model which reads something like God 6 revelation 6 scripture 6 church we should have a newer model which would read something like God 6 people 6 tradition 6 scripture, with revelation attached to no one place

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<sup>95</sup> Not always, for when faith gives way to sight, and when hope possesses that for which it longs, then the media of Scripture and church will no longer be needed.

<sup>96</sup> Barr, *Scope*, 56.

specifically but rather deriving from all the stages alike.<sup>97</sup>

Here, Barr is attempting to show his preferred view that authority resides in the people of God rather than in the Scriptures. With this he also tries to highlight that faith in God is more fundamental than the Bible itself.<sup>98</sup> However, though the Bible writers did not have a complete Bible like we now have today, "the later people of the Biblical period saw the authority of the Bible they already enjoyed and how they related their faith to it."<sup>99</sup> It is apparent that Barr's preferred view of biblical inspiration suggests a denial of the Bible as the Christian's final authority in matters of faith and practice.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, biblical authority is the underlying issue behind Barr's preferred view of biblical inspiration. As we have pointed out already, we must be fair to Barr at every step of this study. Barr does attribute authority to the Bible. He simply denies that its authority is a function of inspiration. This issue of biblical authority is the main corpus of our discussion in the next chapter.

In conclusion, in this chapter we observe that Barr rejects the view

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>99</sup> Carson, "*Books on the Bible*," 351. Carson explains further, "Even if we return to a man like Abraham who had no part of the Bible to hand, his faith is predicated on the basis of a God who supernaturally and propositionally revealed himself to the man."

<sup>100</sup> See Guthrie's comment on Barr's position on biblical authority, "He sees and portrays the position built on full biblical authority as not merely impossible but dangerous," "Biblical Authority and New Testament Scholarship," in *Vox Evangelica* 16 (1986): 13. Guthrie comments further, "those who approach the question of biblical authority from such a point of will never understand the standpoint of those who begin with the conviction that the Bible is the authoritative word of God rather than the words of men." 9

that the Bible has invested authority over the community of faith, the church. Such a theological position or view of the Scriptures affects remarkably his hermeneutical approaches and the subsequent interpretive conclusions. His view of biblical inspiration reveals his basic presupposition about what the Bible is.

The purpose of the next chapter is to establish a view of the authority of Scripture in-keeping with biblical data.