

**JAMES BARR AND BIBLICAL INSPIRATION:
A Critique of Barr's View of Biblical Inspiration in the Light of Recent
Exegetical and Theological Developments in Evangelical Theology**

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by

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This dissertation is dedicated to:
Miriam Ruramai Kahonde/Dzawanda
my dear wife and best friend
and
Linda (Tariro), Martha (Nyasha) and Mildred (Rutendo)
my daughters

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ABSTRACT

Dr. James Barr is a prolific writer who has contributed significantly to theology and biblical studies for over four decades. Indeed, he is a writer and a Bible scholar who deserves a hearing. I became aware of Barr's works and influence on theological trends in the summer of 1991 while taking a graduate course in hermeneutics under Dr. Kenneth Shoemaker at Prairie Graduate School in Three Hills, Alberta, Canada.

This study is on Barr and his view of biblical inspiration. The main body of this dissertation is composed of seven chapters:

Chapter One (Introduction) locates Barr in the broad context of biblical studies, especially in the arena of ongoing issues concerning the difference between evangelical and liberal scholarship. Attention is given to the inquisitiveness of the human mind, the place of the Bible in Christianity, and the ongoing need to study the Bible with an open mind in order to enhance biblical studies. Barr is introduced within the context of his academic standing and contributions to theological studies.

Chapter Two gives an overview of the history of the doctrine of biblical inspiration and the formation of the canon of Scripture. This chapter provides the important background for analysing and evaluating Barr's view of biblical inspiration within a broader context. Various theological camps (evangelical and non-evangelical) are discussed showing their attempts to address the issue of biblical inspiration. The history of the evangelical development of biblical inspiration is also presented.

Chapter Three attempts to help the reader to understand Barr's view of biblical inspiration. It starts by exploring his hermeneutical conclusions on biblical inspiration, his interpretation of two key biblical texts used, conventionally, to support inspiration. The chapter also identifies and discusses specific assumptions Barr makes about the Scriptures. The chapter ends by presenting his preferred view of biblical inspiration.

Chapter Four analyses and evaluates, exegetically, Barr's interpretive conclusions on key biblical texts and his preferred view of biblical inspiration. The chapter also provides a detailed analysis of and treatment of the crucial texts Barr uses to formulate his conclusions on inspiration. Attention is given to the

exegetical issues and understanding of specific texts vis-a-vis their relation to the doctrine of inspiration.

Chapter Five critically evaluates Barr's preferred four-point view of biblical inspiration, his hermeneutical principles, and their implications for the Scriptures.

Chapter Six discusses the perennial issue of biblical authority as the point of departure for evangelical and liberal approaches to studying the Scriptures. This chapter shows clearly that our presuppositions about the Bible affect how we handle the Bible.

Chapter Seven responds to the discoveries of this dissertation and assesses Barr's contribution as being part of the contemporary theological trend to help us sharpen our tools. Thus, a four point view of biblical inspiration is suggested. Considering that theology is a human contrivance, the four views are offered within the context of trying to establish a view of biblical inspiration that is biblical in the light of recent theological and exegetical developments.

Chapter Eight, the conclusion, summarizes this dissertation and offers some specific comments on the biblical doctrine of inspiration. Attention is given to the need to bring the reader into the world of the biblical text, if the voice of God in the written Scriptures is to be heard in our generation as well as in the generations to come. Barr's constructive comments are considered and carefully integrated into these comments. The dissertation closes with a suggestion for further study on the topic of biblical inspiration.

PREFACE

In the course of my theological studies I have deliberately chosen to interact with views contrary to mine with a view to understanding other people's notions and tenets. The first time I came across Professor Barr's works I was intrigued by his linguistic skills and thought provoking reflections. Hence, I decided to do this study: "JAMES BARR AND BIBLICAL INSPIRATION - A Critique of Barr's View of Biblical Inspiration in the Light of Recent Exegetical and Theological Developments in Evangelical Theology."

Unfortunately, studies of this nature sometimes have a propensity to generate more polemical heat than edifying light. Furthermore, it becomes expedient that the researcher-critic be so absorbed in the works of his subject that he can fairly represent the views of his subject with balanced sense.

Therefore, two reasons make this study an exceptional and profitable one. Firstly, there is a deliberate effort to make a constructive contribution to doing theology based on proper biblical exegesis. Secondly, Barr's views have been willingly and objectively employed, not to measure them simply against a fixed, conservative, evangelical orthodoxy, but to challenge the evangelical position.

The inspiration of the Bible is a significant doctrine among evangelicals. However, this doctrine is not as lucid as some of us would like it to be. This is evidenced by the several historical views on biblical inspiration often included in Systematic Theology books. Current studies on the topic also indicate that there is still more to discover about the doctrine of inspiration. Both evangelical and liberal scholars find this topic inexhaustible. The fact is, the Bible as we have it today, did not fall down from heaven in a ready-made prepackaged form. It has an origin, author(s). Who is the author? Who is he or who are they? How did he/they write the Bible? How did the Bible come into being? How should we think of the whole process that led to the production of the Bible? These questions are neither peripheral nor simple.

Barr's view of biblical inspiration shows that there is a need to re-examine (if not adjust) our positions if we carefully consider the biblical data available to us today. However, conceding that theology is a human activity, this study shows that the assumptions or principles one brings to theological or biblical studies remarkably influence how one treats and interprets the Scriptures. Indeed, the foundation determines the structure to be erected. Furthermore, the perennial difference between the liberal and evangelical scholarship should never be downplayed. One's view of the Scriptures colours his/her way of doing theology.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Human beings have always been inquisitive creatures. Hence, in most cases, they have endeavoured to approach critically any data made available to them with a view to offering palatable answers to satisfy their quest for truth within their milieu. However, to their surprise, every new answer to a query raises new sets of questions, and so the cycle goes. This is true of all other academic disciplines. Even in Christian theology and its family of related academic disciplines, as the Church attempts to answer questions about God and his relationship to the world, new questions continue to emerge. By and large, we are still wrestling with the same biblical data, but from different perspectives.

For many centuries, Holy Scripture was indisputably held by many Christians as the very Word of God. This was the case to such an extent that questions dealing with God's words and man's words in Holy Scripture were not raised. According to one of the views held in this respect, the Scriptures were regarded as infallible—a direct product of God himself, having unquestionable authority. The understanding in this regard then was that since the Scriptures were dictated by the Spirit of God, they had a divine guarantee of freedom from error.¹

¹ Fergusson, Sinclair and David F. Wight, eds. *New Dictionary of Theology*. Inter-Varsity Press, 1988. The Westminster Confession (1647), the Belgic Confession (1561) and the early Christian tradition believed the “normative authority of Scripture rested from the start on confidence that all Scripture is God's true teaching through the human authors.”p.337.

However, since the period of the Enlightenment, a time of tremendous scientific discoveries in all aspects of life, these previously uncontradicted views about the Bible could no longer be embraced without thorough investigation or scientific scrutiny. There is no doubt that the time of enlightenment was an epoch which shaped and influenced the conceptual patterns as well as people's ability to ask the hard questions of life.² Whether we like it or not, our present day's quest for truth is heavily influenced by this revolutionary epoch. Reason began its critical work in all the disciplines, the natural sciences, the historical sciences, the humanities, *et cetera*. In the domains of ecclesiastical dogma and teaching, people began to ask: Is the Bible God's word or man's word? What in the Bible is God's word and what is only man's word? Some of these questions are still alive today and have not yet been silenced. Indeed, the Bible is one such book that has not been spared this on-going critical analysis. As a result, its authorship, authority, credibility, origin, to mention but a few, have been questioned, if not refuted, by some of its renowned scholars.

Several years ago on the Zimbabwean front, in his "The Case for a New Bible,"³ Canaan Banana (who was then, an honorary Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of

² Ibid. It was during the Enlightenment that the 'trustworthiness of biblical history and theology' were challenged and new interpretative procedures were formed.

³ Cox, James L., Isabel Mukonyora and Frans J. Verstraelen, ed. in "Rewriting" The Bible: The Real Issues - Perspectives from within Biblical and Religious Studies in Zimbabwe. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1993, pp.17-32. This was a paper presented by Prof. Banana on April 6, 1991 at Hatfield, Harare, Zimbabwe on the task of African (Third World) theologians on the Middle East issues.

Zimbabwe, who was also an ordained clergy with the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe) shows that the questions about the origin and development of the Christian Bible are still far from being settled. In his address, Banana argues for re-writing “a Bible that reflects the realities and possibilities of today’s world.” All this shows that questions after questions arise about the Bible. We cannot silence the controversy about these questions.

In the past, some Bible believers used to be appalled by some of the critics' remarks and treatment of the Bible, and they vehemently reacted to all such scientific criticisms instead of constructively responding and giving palatable answers. Ostensibly, logic and the Christian faith were sometimes perceived as arch rivals by some Bible scholars because scientific investigations of God's word were viewed to be ways of undermining the authenticity and reliability of the Holy Scriptures. Now, times have changed. Some conservatives see the need to interact with other scholarship and their academic works even though they embrace a totally different theological position. Such an interaction helps us to be up to date in our theological pursuits as well as exchange ideas on some issues, and sometimes even adjust our positions. There is always a need for dialogue if we are to understand each other’s point of view. Listening carefully to the views of others enhances our ability to be sympathetic, respectful, and ultimately dialogue with greater understanding. It is with these considerations in mind that this study was born.

Dr. James Barr is an outstanding Bible scholar who has remarkably contributed to biblical studies and theological trends since 1955. He is famous for his works on biblical semantics, interpretation, and authority. He has authored twenty-five books and many papers

and articles. In addition, he has also served in various educational institutions. Dr. Barr has been Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at the University of Oxford, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University, Professor of Old Testament Literature and Theology at the University of Edinburgh, and editor of Westminster Old Testament Library. He has also delivered lectures in biblical studies and theological issues in Great Britain and North America. Dr. Barr has also held teaching positions at the University of Montreal, Princeton University, and the University of Manchester. Currently, he is Professor of Old Testament at Vanderbilt University, Tennessee, in the United States of America.

Hermeneutics is, indeed, Barr's specialty in the fields of biblical and theological studies. He is one of the foremost biblical interpreters in the hall of academia. One of Barr's distinct contributions that he will be remembered for is the hermeneutical debate in *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, in which he convincingly advanced that the meaning of a word is to be determined less by its etymological history than by its contemporary use in context.⁴ He unearthed the exegetical bankruptcy and fallacy in semantics dealing with the linkage of language and mentality, - the correspondence theory of language and reality, a problem grossly overlooked by the famous *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1967.

In the light of Barr's well-informed insight of biblical studies issues, we can safely conclude that his contributions are of the kind that invite us to look at issues with a new perspective. He is a scholar

⁴ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

who, when he speaks, deserves a careful hearing. His theological diagnoses must be taken seriously. During the last several years, Barr has become a significant and controversial figure in exegetical and theological issues. One arena of controversy to which he has contributed through some of his works has been the perennially crucial topic of biblical inspiration.⁵

This study, therefore, is a critique of Barr's view of biblical inspiration in the light of some of the recent exegetical and theological developments in evangelical theology around the world. This dissertation is an endeavour to elucidate and evaluate Barr's view of biblical inspiration in the light of recent theological discoveries. Furthermore, in this study, Barr is viewed as a representative of various recent nuances of inspiration, a theological direction that warrants, in my view, a full-length critical theological reflection.

To facilitate the goals of this research, the purpose of the next chapter is to acquaint the reader with a summary of the history of the doctrine of biblical inspiration. This provides a crucial foundation for the developments and sub-titles highlighted in this dissertation.

⁵ Some of Barr's works pertinent to the topic under investigation include: *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1980); *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983); *Beyond Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984); and *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, 1973).

CHAPTER TWO

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³ Ibid., 47-48.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Furthermore, the formation and canonization of Scripture was

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² Ibid., 133.

¹³ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Baker Book House, 754.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures. Thus “all Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Gk. text).²³

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁹ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

³¹ Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 134.

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

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

³⁴ Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 135.

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

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

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

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

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

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

times.”³⁷

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴³ Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 136.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and “unerring light.”⁵⁷

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶² See Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 137.

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

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

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

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

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 225.

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

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

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

⁶⁷ Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 137.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷¹ Ibid., 112-113.

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

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

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

The Formation of the Canon of Scripture

⁷² Ibid., 113-114.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* See pp. 71, 78, 79, 208ff.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸² Bruce, *Canon of Scripture*, 19.

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

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

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

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *Concise Bible Dictionary*, 127.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

⁸⁶ Ibid.

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

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

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

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

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

⁹⁰ Miller, *Biblical Introduction*, 89.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹² Ibid., 48-49.

⁹³ Ibid., 50.

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

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

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

Warfield comments further:

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

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

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

F.F. Bruce agrees when he comments:

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

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

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

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

⁹⁵ Ibid., 112.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁸ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 255.

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

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

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

¹⁰² Ibid., 260.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 261.

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

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

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

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

Bruce explains further:

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

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 263.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 263.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 264.

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰⁸ Achtemeier, *Inspiration of Scripture*, 123.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 124-134.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 123.

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

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

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

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

¹¹¹ Ibid., 126.

¹¹² Ibid., 125

¹¹³ Ibid., 126.

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 130

Scripture as we have it today. Achtemeier comments:

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 131.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 132.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

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

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

Summary

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

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

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

CHAPTER THREE

JAMES BARR'S VIEW OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear statement of James Barr's view about the nature of biblical inspiration, documenting his position with references to some of his most significant published works on the topic of inspiration. Barr's approach to biblical exegesis and his interpretation of key biblical passages on inspiration will be examined along with his four-point summary of the nature of biblical inspiration. The chapter will begin with an overview of Barr's understanding of biblical inspiration, and conclude with a concise summary of his position.

1. Barr's Hermeneutical Conclusions

In his book, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*, Barr argues:

The Bible is in its origin a *product* of the believing community. Modern biblical study has made this much more plain to us than it could ever have been in the past. Traditional doctrines of scripture suggested to Christians over many centuries that the Bible was a message *from* God to the community. And of course we can still say this, but we can say it more indirectly: in the sense, perhaps that scripture grew out of the tradition of the believing community

but, having so grown, became in its turn the Word of God to the community.¹

Therefore, he concludes:

Scripture arose *out of* the traditions of the community. 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.²

Barr argues further:

The Bible, then, is the product of tradition, editing, and revision on the part of the community. But this means that the argument traditionally considered to be 'Catholic,' namely that the Bible derived from the church, is in many ways generally valid as against the position esteemed as 'Protestant,' which was reluctant to see the Bible as deriving from the church and which therefore sought to give the Scripture priority over the church in order of revelation.³

These quotations provide some insight into Barr's understanding of Scripture from which his view of biblical inspiration is formulated. His perspective is heavily influenced by the assumptions he makes about the Scriptures. There are at least two principles Barr advances in his view of

¹ James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*, London: SCM, 1980, 113.

² Ibid.

³ James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983, 28.

biblical inspiration. The purpose of the next section is to highlight and examine these critical principles.

A. Scripture is the Product of the Community

The first principle Barr makes about the Scriptures is that Scripture is the product of the community. The key issue related to this principle concerns the process by which the Scriptures came into being. Barr makes his view of the origin of the Bible clear when he postulates:

Scripture emerged from the tradition of the people of God. Instead of the traditional model which reads something like God ÿ revelation ÿ scripture ÿ church we should have a newer model which would read something like ÿ God ÿ people ÿ tradition ÿ scripture, with revelation attached to no one place specifically but rather deriving from all the stages alike.⁴

Hence, he concludes, “Thus scripture was preceded by tradition and tradition came from the people of God, from the believing community.”⁵ Indeed, we ought to recognize that the Bible writers sometimes used existing sources or tradition during the inscripturation process. According to Barr, everything they wrote was not all given by immediate revelation. However, his view of the Bible as a product of believing communities extends far beyond this obvious fact. In essence, he does not view the entire process that led to the production of the Scriptures to be a totally

⁴ Barr, *Scope*, 60.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

special act of God distinct from God's communication with mankind today.⁶ He explains:

And, more important, scripture was not created by a totally special act of God through a very small number of inspired writers: it came to be through the crystallization of the tradition of the people of God.⁷

Commenting on this communal crystallization of the tradition of the people of God into the Bible, Barr suggests that "the primary direction of movement is not from God to man, but rather earlier to later."⁸ He comments further:

Rather, it is graded and selected presentation from within the totality of ancient tradition of the people of God. It is not just all tradition, but certain leading and dominant traditions; and it is not just any person, but persons of leadership, approved and accepted in the believing communities. It is not just tradition as it happened to be, but tradition shaped and edited in such a necessary presentation of that tradition, as the older community wanted it to be known to the later community.⁹

Barr also advances the view that "the Bible, then, is the product of the tradition, editing, and revision on the part of the community."¹⁰

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 115.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Barr, *Holy Scripture*, 28.

This theological development can be traced to the Barthian and Biblical theology movements where there was a shift of “theological thoughts from an authority-centred structure to one which is less concerned with authorising statements by means of a priori norm.”¹¹ This shift in doing theology has the propensity to empower the reader or the theologian to decide how the biblical text is to be affirmed or interpreted instead of allowing the text to set its agenda and define its exegetical parameters. It seems it is from such an understanding of the origin and the nature of the Bible that Barr appears to discount the authority of the Bible over the community it grew out of. He makes this point even clearer when he argues:

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. Rather, our doctrinal and ethical positions have as their point of origin a total vision, a conception of what Christian life, action and society should be like. These visions come from Christian man, informed by the Bible but also informed by all sorts of other influences which play upon their lives: actually many of the beliefs which are most adamantly defended on the grounds of their biblical basis cannot be derived from the Bible at all, for instance the idea that inspiration of scripture is a guard against historical error and is the foundation of faith and practice.¹²

In other words, by virtue of the fact that the Bible grew out of the tradition

¹¹ Paul Ronald Wells, *James Barr and the Bible*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980, 3.

¹² Barr, *Scope*, 62.

of the believing community, Barr seems to suggest that the community has authority over the Bible and vice versa. This is evidenced by his proposal to move away from the God ÿ revelation ÿ scripture ÿ church model to the God ÿ people ÿ tradition ÿ scripture model.¹³

At best, this view of scripture does not claim that the Bible is the final authority in matters of doctrine and practice. Instead, the Bible's authority becomes one limited to interrogating or raising questions. Barr explains:

The Bible exercises a critical role: it questions what people think, it queries the basis of their judgments, it asks whether the tradition which modern men form is really in continuity with its biblical origins. It is through this checking and questioning role that the Bible exercises its authority: the Bible queries the tradition of its own interpretation.¹⁴

B. Inspiration Does Not Guarantee Inerrancy

The second significant principle Barr makes is that biblical inspiration does not guarantee that the Bible is an inerrant book. This principle concerns the theological status of the Scriptures. Barr expounds this principle:

The fact is that the Bible is not an absolutely inerrant book. To force upon it such a designation is to insist on ascribing to it a character derived from human opinion and contrary to its own actual nature. . . Any realistic approach to the subject must begin by accepting that the Bible *does* contain some factual error. It is simply not the nature of the Bible that all its statements are correct.

¹³ Ibid., 60.

¹⁴ Ibid., 62-63.

To insist that they *must* be correct is to impose a false character upon the Bible. Any account of inspiration must therefore begin by accepting that inspiration does not guarantee inerrancy, and indeed that inerrancy was not at all the purpose of divine inspiration.¹⁵

Barr explains further:

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 the very best, theological assertions that differ in tendency and emphasis from others within the Bible. As has been said, no doctrine of inspiration is of any use if it does not take into account of these realities, for they are the realities of the Bible itself. However, it should not be supposed that the errors and the 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.¹⁶

According to Barr, the conventional link between inspiration and inerrancy ought to be discontinued because it is theologically enigmatic and misleading. Hence, he argues that the Bible could still be viewed as a “substantially reliable” book although it is not “absolutely true to fact.”¹⁷

¹⁵ James Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984, 124-26. See also James Barr, *Fundamentalism*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1977, 281-84, for selected examples of “factual errors” in the Bible, for example: Who killed Goliath? cf. I Sam. 17, II Sam. 21:19 and I Chron. 20:5. Was it David or Elhanan?

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

He explains:

Theologically this is not difficult: why should God not have inspired a scripture with error in it through which he might nevertheless truly communicate with men? The Gospels themselves, after all, are full of parables, which are fictions. All this can be argued. But as a matter of practical semantics it is not easy to get rid of the burden which past history has loaded upon such a word.¹⁸

Indeed, Barr advances that biblical inspiration does not imply that the Bible is an inerrant book. He argues that it is possible to have an inspired Bible that is also not absolutely true to fact.

The next section will examine Barr's understanding of the term "inspiration" within its biblical context.

2. Barr's Comments on the Term "Inspiration"

The issue of biblical inspiration is a dominant theme in three of Barr's books, *The Bible in the Modern World* (1973), *The Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (1983), and *Beyond Fundamentalism* (1984). Barr asserts that "biblical inspiration is hard to describe,"¹⁹ and he asks crucial questions: "But *in what way* does scripture come from God? In what way can he be thought to have inspired it?" Barr admits, "This is the thorniest problem of any idea of biblical inspiration."²⁰

Barr believes that the term *inspiration*, in its traditional usage,

¹⁸ James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World*. London: SCM Press, 1973, 16.

¹⁹ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 125.

²⁰ Barr, *Modern World*, 13.

places emphasis on “the *origin* of the Bible,” that it somehow “comes from God, and this differentiates it from other writings, which are the work of men.”²¹ Commenting on the contemporary usage of the term *inspiration*, Barr says:

To the average layman, no doubt this is the term which is most likely to be applied to the Bible: it is ‘inspired,’ it somehow comes from God, what is in it is true, it does not contain falsehood. Among theologians, however, the term ‘inspiration’ has not been very much used in modern times. . . Thus the term has been definitely out of fashion: the World Council of Churches study found it a ‘surprise’ that they were led to think of it.²²

Furthermore, Barr concludes that the historical account of the roots of biblical inspiration is not clear.²³ Therefore, he sees the need to redefine the term “inspiration.” Hence, he provides a probable etymological explanation about the concept of “inspiration” that goes back to the Old Testament imagery of a God who spoke “with a grammar the same as that of human speakers.”²⁴ Here, Barr challenges the orthodox view which claims that the words and ideas expressed by the human authors were

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Barr, *Scope*, 115. Barr says, “One of the peculiarities of scripture was that by the nature of its own formation it obscured its own earlier history.” He also concludes that “inspiration is a rather abstract term: the simpler and more direct term which lies behind it is ‘to breathe,’” See *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 1.

²⁴ Ibid., 13-14. Barr comments, “But not only did God himself thus speak in articulate language; he also had agents who spoke for him, and the words which they spoke were words which God was believed to have given them to speak. . . Yet the term ‘inspire,’ though it appears in the Bible itself, does so only in a late and marginal document (II Tim. 3.16).”

exactly what God intended to communicate. Although he acknowledges that God through his Spirit had a significant role in the production of the Scriptures, he believes that the Bible authors' responses "were in adequate measure true and valid responses, which thus formed some sort of index to his nature and activity."²⁵ He explains further:

God did not tell Israel how many kings there had been in the land of Edom (Gen.36), nor did he have to intervene to tell that Jehoshaphat began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel (I Kings 22.41); they knew this already, things of this kind were normal human information.²⁶

In other words, Barr views part of the process that led to the production of the Bible as nothing more than a purely human outcome. Therefore, according to Barr, the process of 'inspiration' implies that God played a significant role in the process but he is not fully responsible for the quality of the end product, that is, the Bible as we have it in its final composition. Basically, Barr advances a very broad meaning of this biblical term "inspiration." He seems to drive a wedge that separates the text (the written word) and the process that led to the production of the Bible.²⁷ As a result, he concludes that it is the believing community that is inspired²⁸ although in some sense we might also say that the Bible somehow comes from God.

Barr's views of biblical inspiration are based on his overall view

²⁵ Barr, *Scope*, 124.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

of scripture which in turn colour his exegetical interpretations of the two passages of scripture that address overtly the issue of biblical inspiration, namely, II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21. According to Barr, these two passages of scripture have been misconstrued, taken out of their contexts, and used as proof texts for the doctrine of inspiration by fundamentalist and/or some evangelical scholars.²⁹ Hence, he directs specific attention to explaining his preferred view of inspiration.

The next section will analyse Barr's interpretation of II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:19-20.

3. Barr's Interpretation of II Timothy 3:16-17

One of the most explicit New Testament texts on biblical inspiration is II Timothy 3:16-17:

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!8, (μ` <, BDĪ H !B" < D2TF4<, BDĪ H B" 4*, \ " < J-< | < *46" 4@Fb<®, È<"
-DJ4@H1 Ī J@2, @2-<2DT B@H BDĪ HB < SD(@< • (" 2Ī < |>ODJ4FμX<@H

All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NIV)

Commenting on the difficulty of the key phrase in II Timothy 3:16, Barr explains:

Even there its scope and syntax may be variously interpreted: contrast the AV

²⁸ Barr, *Modern World*, 13.

²⁹ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 1.

with its ‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine. . .’ and the NEB with its ‘Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth. . .’³⁰

The real grammatical or syntactical issue in the II Timothy 3:16 passage, however, is whether the key phrase *panthe biblia* functions attributively or predicatively in the clause. However, although Barr is aware of the distinct difference between interpreting II Timothy 3:16 as picturing the entirety of the Bible, and focussing on each individual text or sentence,³¹ he reasons that one’s exegetical choice makes no “great difference to the idea of inspiration.”³² In a word, the phrase *panthe biblia* (all scripture) in the text under consideration did not have in mind the same collection of Hebrew and early Christian literature that constitute the Bible (the Protestant Bible) as we have it today.

Furthermore, even though the term inspired or inspiration, appears in the Bible in II Timothy 3:16, Barr considers the book of II Timothy to be “a late and marginal source of the New Testament.”³³ Therefore, he argues that it is not clear whether this passage refers to or includes Old and/or New Testament materials, or simply shows “the function of this divinely-inspired scripture.”³⁴

According to Barr, II Timothy 3:16 does not tell us much about

³⁰ Barr, *Modern World*, 14.

³¹ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 1

³² Ibid.

³³ Barr, *Modern World*, 14.

³⁴ Barr, *Scope*, 119.

its author's intention, whether the focus is on the origin of scripture or its present method of operation. We may not be able to establish whether "God 'breathed' in or into, the original production of it, or whether he now 'breathes' through it."³⁵ Barr argues further, that the author of this passage seemed to have no intention of addressing this question of inspiration in detail.³⁶

Therefore, Barr concludes that this uncertainty about the meaning of the term 'inspiration' "is symptomatic: it is a correct indication of the fact that the Bible is not very interested in its own inspiration and provides very little evidence about the matter."³⁷ As a result, Barr asserts:

In the structure of Christian doctrine, inspiration has a secondary or tertiary status: that is, we can seek to give an account of it by showing that it is related to, or analogous to, other elements of Christian doctrine which are more solidly evidenced and more widely based.³⁸

To help us understand the idea of divine breathing, Barr offers three images. The first image arises from the Bible's concept of "God's breath as the basis for man's life,"³⁹ as in Gen. 2:7, "God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." In this image, Barr proposes that we consider scripture "as having life given by God or as communicating life

³⁵ Ibid., 2.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 125.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 2.

in the same way as God's spirit in other ways communicating life."⁴⁰

The second image Barr offers is to understand breath as a "vehicle of *speech*."⁴¹ Since man speaks via breath, inspiration of scripture would mean that scripture is the final outcome of God's speech because he breathed into it.

The third image carries the idea of "the association of the man or woman who is specially appointed or used as the mouthpiece of God, as the speaker on his behalf."⁴² This image depicts someone speaking under the guidance of the spirit or breath of God within him, as in the case of Old Testament prophets."⁴³

Barr believes that II Timothy 3:16 is not clear enough to lead us to any specific conclusion on the nature of biblical inspiration.⁴⁴ Rather, he suggests that a study of II Timothy 3:16 within its context leads us to the practical effects of scripture; that is, "scripture is *able* to instruct!"⁴⁵ Indeed, Barr even proposes that II Timothy 3:16 may be understood as referring simply to how scripture had worked in Timothy's past life as well as how it would then function in his future ministry.⁴⁶ Therefore, according to Barr, obviously responding to the fundamentalist interpretation, this text says nothing about the Bible becoming the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 126-127.

governing criterion for defining the Christian faith because it is ‘God-breathed.’ Furthermore, he advances the notion that inerrancy of scripture, that is, the belief that all historical statements in the Bible are accurate and without error, ignores the context of this passage. Barr summarizes his conclusions about II Timothy 3:16:

It is absolutely certain that II Tim.3.16 cannot be taken as a clearly delimited definition of the unique inspiration of the sixty-six books of the modern Protestant canon. The idea is not that of a quality that attaches uniquely to a precisely defined set of books: it is rather a quality that is possessed by the entire body of writings upon which Timothy has been educated and which are recognized in the church as religiously wholesome and authoritative. . . . One other point: it is highly significant that the inspiration of scripture received explicit mention not only rarely (indeed here only) but also on the margin rather than in the centre of the New Testament.⁴⁷

Basically, for Barr, II Timothy 3:16-17 highlights nothing beyond the usefulness of scripture, that is, “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” According to Barr, the theological accent is on the Scripture’s capability to instruct a person on how to live properly under God’s instruction.

4. Barr’s Interpretation of II Peter 1:20-21

The second passage of scripture Barr considers in II Peter 1:20-

⁴⁷ Ibid.

21:

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¡B4Bf, TH@Û (\<, J" 4q@Û (D 2, 8Zµ" J4• <2Df B@L ² <, P20 BD@NOJ, \ "
B@X, • 88 BBÍ B<, bµ" J@H (\@L N, D µ, <@4 ¡8V8OF" < • BÍ 2, @Ø
-<2DT B@4

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (NIV)

Barr first observes that the writer of this passage is concentrating primarily on prophecy and not necessarily on the nature of scripture or biblical inspiration. He elucidates this point:

The interpretation of prophetic scripture is not something that the individual can legitimately do. It is a matter therefore that lies in the hands of the church community and its tradition of understanding. The writer is concerned by the outgrowth of wild and undisciplined interpretations of prophecy, with their consequent violent effects upon the Christian expectation of the end of the world. He devotes a strong rhetoric to condemning the excesses that may result from these tendencies. But how does he hope to control them? There is indeed scripture, like the letters of St. Paul, but it can be twisted and distorted (II Peter 3.16), and this is exactly happening. The implication that seems to underlie the argument is: there is a central and accepted understanding within the church, and all interpretation must be in accordance with this understanding. No one can properly set out to give interpretations of his own which differ from it.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid., 5-6.

Barr does not dwell at length on II Peter 1:20-21. Since this passage focuses primarily on prophecy and prophetic interpretation, he basically considers II Peter 1:20-21 irrelevant to the topic of biblical inspiration. He concludes, therefore, that it should not be cited as a text that teaches about biblical inspiration. According to Barr, any reference to or argument for biblical inspiration based on II Peter 1:20-21 is a violation of biblical hermeneutics since the context of the passage does not address the issue of biblical inspiration.

Barr believes that the emphasis of this biblical text is “on the centrality of the church’s communal understanding and custom as the locus for the interpretation of scripture” since biblical prophecies came as people were moved by the Holy Spirit and not by their individual private interpretation.⁴⁹ Therefore, he concludes:

Once again, then, one of the key passages upon which fundamentalist apologetic has heavily relied turn out to mean something different. It looks in a quite different direction. Only when the text is read through the spectacles of fundamentalism does it appear to support that cause.⁵⁰

In summary, Barr provides an exegetical analysis of the two biblical passages (II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21) which the evangelical scholarship has traditionally used as proof texts for the doctrine of inspiration. He concludes that these passages have been misinterpreted and used to espouse the ‘doctrine of biblical’ inspiration, a

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7.

concept they do not address. Barr caps his argument by saying that, ultimately, inspiration is a minor topic in the Bible. Furthermore, since Barr concludes that inspiration is an abstract term in the Scriptures, he exercises the liberty to redefine biblical inspiration.

Therefore, the next section will draw together and summarize the previous discussion in this chapter and identify Barr's understanding of biblical inspiration.

5. Barr's Own Summary of His View of Inspiration

In his book, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, under the heading 'How then Think of Inspiration?' Barr presents four propositions that summarize his conclusions about biblical inspiration. These four propositions also shed light on the underlying assumptions Barr makes the Scriptures.

A. Inspiration is not a Central Doctrine

First, Barr concludes that "the idea of inspiration is only a minor note within scripture itself: to make it into something central is to falsify the balance of biblical teaching."⁵¹ He says:

For the fundamentalist, to say anything that questions his idea of biblical inspiration will seem to be totally negative, to be an attack upon the whole essence of religious faith.⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid., 124.

⁵² Ibid.

Barr believes that fundamentalists have mistakenly turned the doctrine of inspiration into a central theme in the Scriptures. Therefore, he explains further that “the person who escapes from fundamentalism must realize that *it is the fundamentalist who falsifies the inspiration of scripture.*”⁵³

Here, Barr is clearly reacting to the notion prevalent in evangelical scholarship, that the inspiration of Scripture is “an absolutely central and pivotal doctrine, without which, it is supposed, nothing can be positively believed. It is a keystone of the arch of faith, without which the entire structure will collapse.”⁵⁴ Barr believes that the evangelical scholarship’s view of biblical inspiration makes the Bible an inerrant book.⁵⁵ Therefore, he vehemently opposes this view of biblical inspiration because he believes it imposes a false character upon the Scriptures. He concludes, “To force upon it such a designation is to insist on ascribing to it a character derived from human opinion and contrary to its own actual nature.”⁵⁶

Therefore, given the fact that there is only one biblical passage (II Timothy 3:16-17) that explicitly addresses the topic of inspiration, Barr concludes that inspiration is an inconsequential matter in the Bible.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 124.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Barr states that “the fact is that the Bible is not an absolutely inerrant book.”

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 4.

Basically, Barr is saying that biblical inspiration should not be regarded as a major topic in theological studies because the Bible is virtually silent on this topic.

B. Inspiration Applies to the Community of Faith

Second, Barr proposes:

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. To suppose that inspiration is a momentary process, guiding the writers once and for all at one decisive stage of the production of scripture and protecting them from all error, is on the one hand impossibly artificial and on the other completely lacking in evidence within scripture itself. Scripture itself gives no suggestion that the writers, as ‘authors’ of biblical books, were anything different from what they were as human persons in the rest of their lives and activity.⁵⁸

Barr also argues that just as the nature of Jesus Christ was both human and divine, so also scripture can be considered to be both human and divine:

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

⁵⁸ Ibid., 125.

eternal God communicates with us, and we with him.⁵⁹

“Inspiration,” Barr says, “might then be thought of as the link, the bond, that holds the being of scripture as word of God and its being as word of man together in one.”⁶⁰ Biblical inspiration, according to Barr, would have to be perceived as the whole process by which the believing community, through oral tradition, editing, reduction, and transference of information, produced the Scriptures. Barr says that this process can be considered as a human act because their product, the Bible, has factual errors, typical of any human product.⁶¹ Therefore, the inspiration process cannot involve human beings and yet create an objective standard of truth.⁶²

C. Inspiration Includes the Contemporary Effects of Scripture

Barr’s third proposition about inspiration is that when the Bible, through the work of the Holy Spirit, becomes the word of God for us today, that is an extension of the inspiration process.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid., 126.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 124-125.

⁶¹ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 126.

⁶² Barr alludes to this view when he says, “The Bible does not have the property of perfection, which belongs only to God himself. It is not part of the Christian faith that the Bible furnishes a depiction of God’s possessing the maximum possible accuracy.” See Barr, *Scope*, 55.

⁶³ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 126. Barr reckons that this process of the Bible becoming the word of God for us is a continual phenomenon in both the believing community and the individual believer.

Moreover, in keeping with his view that the Bible is the product of the community of the biblical era rather than a package of books authored by isolated individuals, Barr proposes this derivative:

The inspiration of scripture is the conception that scripture is the result of exactly similar action of the Spirit within the community from which the scriptures themselves emerged. Inspiration is a way of affirming that God was present in his community in the Spirit as it formed and shaped the traditions that became scripture. As the Spirit gave understanding to the community and its leadership in the formation of these traditions and in the crystallization of them as scripture, so the Spirit today gives understanding to the community in the interpretation of these same scriptures.⁶⁴

In this third proposition about biblical inspiration, Barr asserts that inspiration is not limited to the process that led to the production of the Bible as we have it today, but it also extends and includes the contemporary effects of Scripture. According to Barr, the same Spirit who guided the believing communities to produce the Scriptures also guides today's believing communities to interpret the Word of Word as they interact with the Scriptures.⁶⁵

Therefore, Barr concludes that "The Bible is the word of God as and when the divine Spirit breathes through it."⁶⁶ In other words, Barr proposes that the Bible becomes God's Word for us at some particular moment when the Spirit guides us to interpret or apply it. He argues:

⁶⁴ Ibid., 128.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 126.

Just as, for Paul, the written law, though true, authoritative and the word of God, was in itself the minister of death and not of life, except when the Spirit breathed through it; so it may be for the Bible as a whole, including the New Testament.⁶⁷

Therefore, Barr attaches inspiration to the current effects of the Scriptures in the life of the Church and of the individual believer.

D. Inspiration Means Scripture is Inspiring

The fourth and final proposition about biblical inspiration which Barr posits is based on “the analogy of the *inspiring teacher*”⁶⁸ whose objective is that the pupils are inspired to receive “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.”⁶⁹ Here, inspiration is regarded as an on-going process. Barr says:

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.⁷⁰

Barr explains further:

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 128.

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 of inspiration may prove helpful to many.⁷¹

Barr also advances that inspiration means Scripture is *inspiring*. In other words, the Scriptures are capable of stimulating the emotional and mental abilities of the reader. Such stimulation breeds creativity in thought or action within the realm of biblical interpretation.⁷² In this proposition, biblical inspiration should be understood as that intrinsic quality within the Bible that actuates the reader to be creative in his attempts to understand and interpret the Scriptures within the vast variety of God's dealings with mankind.⁷³

Barr sums up his proposition by asserting that any view of biblical inspiration that fails to incorporate the qualities he has articulated would be deficient because:

It vastly magnifies the importance of inspiration, . . . it produces a seriously artificial and disproportionate account of inspiration, and—as we have seen—it wildly contradicts the evidence of inspired scripture itself by going far beyond anything that the Bible itself had to say about the subject. . . We can use the concept usefully, and develop its contours creatively, only in so far as we integrate it with other aspects of Christian doctrine and seek to perceive it in the light of them.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 130.

Furthermore, Barr suggests that a proper view of biblical inspiration should recognize that:

God's communication with the men of the biblical period was not on any different terms from the mode of his communication with his people today. 'Inspiration' would then mean that the god whom we worship was also likewise in contact with his people in ancient times, and that in their particular circumstances, in the stage in which they existed, he was present in the formation of their tradition as scripture; but that the mode of this contact was not different from the mode in which God has continued to make himself known to men.⁷⁵

In summary, we have seen that Barr advances four propositions about his preferred view of biblical inspiration: (1) inspiration is not a central doctrine in the Bible; (2) inspiration should be applied or attributed to the entire tradition of the believing community that produced the Scriptures rather than to the books they wrote; (3) inspiration includes the contemporary processes of interpreting the Bible; and (4) inspiration means that scripture is inspiring, stimulating the reader to be creative in the on-going process of biblical interpretation.

Summary

In this chapter we have presented Barr's understanding of biblical inspiration. First, we observed that there are two key principles that influence his view of biblical inspiration: (1) scripture is the product of

⁷⁵ Barr, *Modern World*, 18.

the believing communities; and (2) inspiration does not guarantee that the Bible is an inerrant book. In both cases, Barr is highlighting the fundamental tension between the human and divine agency in bringing about the Bible as an authoritative document. For Barr, the highest point of reference in the production of the Bible is the believing community, that is, the community generates, out of its own processes, the Bible as an end product. In other words, the community determines the meaning of the Bible.

Second, from our inquiry into his interpretation of II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21 and his understanding of biblical inspiration, Barr makes four conclusions about inspiration: (1) the Bible is not very much concerned about its inspiration (this is at best a minor and secondary theme in the Scriptures); (2) inspiration is a process to be applied to the tradition of the believing communities and everything that led to the production of the Bible; (3) inspiration includes also, and perhaps more significantly, the existential encounter between the ancient texts and its modern reader; and (4) inspiration, as a quality of Scripture, refers to the inspiring effect it has on those who read it rather than to the nature of the Scriptures.

Third, we also observed that Barr believes II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21 have been seriously misinterpreted out of their contexts and misused to support the doctrine of inspiration. He presents two points that challenge the fundamentalist view: (1) These two passages do not say that since Scripture is inspired, it ought to be the controlling criterion for defining the Christian faith; and (2) Scripture, for the Bible

authors, was not the same collection of the Old and New Testament books that make up our modern Christian Bible. Basically, Barr concludes that the inspiration of Scripture was not a pivotal concept for the writers of the Bible.

The next chapter will make a critical inquiry into Barr's interpretive conclusions on II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21.

CHAPTER FOUR

A CRITIQUE OF BARR'S INTERPRETIVE CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate Barr's interpretation of II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21. Each of these texts will be introduced with a brief overview of its exegetical issues. Then Barr's interpretive conclusions about these passages and their bearing on the theology of inspiration will be critically analysed. Finally, the chapter will end with a comprehensive summary of Barr's exegetical deficiencies in interpreting II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21.

II Timothy 3:16-17

B F" (D" N- 2, ` B<, LFJ@H 6" Â é NX84µ@H BDĪ H *4" F6" 8\ "<, BDĪ H
!8, (µ` <, BDĪ H !B" < D2TF4<, BDĪ H B" 4*, \ " < J-< |< *46" 4@Fb<®, Ē<"
-DJ4@H¹ ÒJ@2, @2-<2DT B@H BDĪ HB < \$D(@< • (" 2Ī < |>ODJ4FµX<@H

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.(NIV)

Indeed, II Timothy 3:16-17 has been traditionally used over the years by evangelical scholarship to buttress the doctrine and extent of

biblical inspiration.¹ Some have concluded that II Timothy 3:16-17 affirms the divine authorship of all Scripture.² Others have also asserted that II Timothy 3:16-17 provides a basis for the doctrine of inspiration:

When Paul declares, then, that "every Scripture," or "all Scripture" is the product of the Divine breath, "is God-breathed," he asserts with as much energy as he could employ that Scripture is the product of a specifically Divine operation.³

The next section will identify exegetical issues raised in II Timothy 3:16-17.

Overview of Exegetical Issues of II Timothy 3:16-17

In his effort to define the concept of biblical inspiration Warfield admits that there are ambiguities in this passage:

There is room for some difference of opinion as to the exact construction of this declaration. Shall we render "Every Scripture" or "All Scripture?" Shall we render "Every [or all] Scripture is God-breathed and [therefore] profitable," or "Every [or all] Scripture, being God-breathed, is as well profitable?" No

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 202.

² Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation--The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 55. Pinnock comments further, "What the Scripture says, God says. It is a God-breathed (*theopneustic*) document. For that reason Paul feels free to personify Scripture as God speaking (Gal. 3:8, 22; Rom. 9:17)."

³ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (New York: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), 133.

doubt both questions are interesting, but for the main matter now engaging our attention they are both indifferent. . . . In both cases these Sacred Scriptures are declared to owe their value to their divine origin; and in both cases this Divine origin is energetically asserted of their entire fabric.⁴

Greek grammarians have shown us that the beginning part of II Timothy 3:16 is an ambiguous construction since we must decide whether B F" (D" N- 2, ` B<, LFJ@H“is predicate or attributive structure.”⁵

According to Porter, the Greek predicate structure is "a means of adding something to the qualities or characteristics of a substantive . . . by ascribing or predicating something to a substantive."⁶ In these constructions, predication is marked by the modifying word, usually an adjective, "not having an article, whether or not the substantive does."⁷ This automatically poses a potential ambiguity in cases where the substantive has no article. The context may or may not be decisive. However, usually the substantive and the adjective, or other word employed, would have to agree in case, gender and number.⁸

By contrast, an "attributive structure in Greek involves the direct attribution of qualities or characteristics to a substantive"⁹ by means of the following syntactical constructions:

⁴ Ibid., 134.

⁵ Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 120.

⁶ Ibid., 118.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 116.

‘Attributive structure’ observes that the tendency in Greek (though not the absolute rule) is that, when a substantive is in a group where a modifier (often an adjective) is also filling a slot, either they both have the article of the governing (or head) term (substantive) or they both do not. If they both do have the article, they may share the same article, with the adjective falling between the article and the substantive (article-adjective-substantive) (position 1) or the adjective may have its own article (article-substantive-article-adjective) (position 2).¹⁰

As a result, the ambiguity of the syntax of this verse allows for several different translations. There are, in fact, three key interpretive issues in II Timothy 3:16-17 that should be addressed, two of which hinge on these ambiguities: (1) the syntactical significance and meaning of $\text{B } \text{F}''$ and the scope of the phrase $\text{B } \text{F}''$ ($\text{D}'' \text{NZ}$); (2) the meaning of $2, \text{`B} <, \text{LFJ@H}$ and (3) the placement of the implied or understood verb $\text{FJ}\backslash <$ (*is*),¹¹ which is really the syntactical function of $2, \text{`B} <, \text{LFJ@H}$ relative to ($\text{D}'' \text{NZ}$). It goes without saying that one's interpretive approaches to these issues determine the final interpretive conclusions on the meaning of II Timothy 3:16-17.

The next section will identify and critique Barr's interpretive conclusions with regards to these exegetical issues in II Timothy 3:16-17. What interpretive conclusions does he adopt in his exegetical treatment of II Timothy 3:16-17?

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ This is really an English translation problem since the verb $\text{FJ}\backslash <$ does not even appear in the Greek text.

Barr's Interpretations of II Timothy 3:16-17

Issue One: The Meaning and Scope of ἅ ἡ γράμματα

The first exegetical issue concerns the meaning of ἅ ἡ γράμματα. There are several interpretive approaches to this grammatical issue: Should it be rendered "all," "the whole," or "every?" Some Greek scholars have concluded that the adjective ἅ ἡ γράμματα means "all" when it is used substantively with the article and "every" when it is used without the article.¹² However, in certain technical constructions and in proper names this rule appears to be suspended.¹³ This construction may also be used to highlight the "partitive aspect of the expression, and, if this is so, the present phrase may mean Scripture as viewed in each separate part of it."¹⁴ Commenting on the difficulty of deciding on the meaning of ἅ ἡ γράμματα, that is, whether it should be 'every,' 'the whole' or 'all,' Kelly says:

The problem is complicated by the fact that we cannot be sure how strictly this dogma was observed in the first-century Koine, but the balance of argument seems in favour of Every Scripture.¹⁵

¹² Bruce Corley, "Biblical Teaching on Inspiration and Inerrancy," in *The Proceedings of the Conference of Biblical Inerrancy* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 451.

¹³ Ibid. e.g. In Romans 11:26, ἅ ἡ Ἰσραὴλ means "all Israel."

¹⁴ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 163.

¹⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: I Timothy, II Timothy, and Titus* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1963), 202.

Some scholars see no essential exegetical differences in rendering Β Φ" 'all' or 'every' because, "'All Scripture' perceives scripture as a whole, and 'every scripture' perceives it in terms of all its components."¹⁶

However, we recommend that these two approaches be kept separate because in the final analysis, they lead to two distinct exegetical conclusions. 'All' Scripture implies that there is a complete, established, and collective body of scripture. 'Every' Scripture allows for an undefined, fluid, uncertain or perhaps fragmented body of scripture. Therefore, one's exegetical approach to this issue is quite significant, for that lays an interpretive base.

Barr's Interpretive Conclusions on Α Φ" ' D" NZ

On the meaning of Β Φ" (D" NZ (*pasa graph'*), Barr explains:

When we say 'all scripture' we picture the entirety of the Bible. If the meaning is 'every scripture,' then the word 'scripture' does not designate the entirety of the Bible; rather, it is a word for each individual passage or sentence. For our purpose it will not be necessary to make a definite decision between these two, and it may not be possible to do so; but it is good to have in mind that both possibilities are there.¹⁷

Nonetheless, from examining Barr's writing,¹⁸ we can see that he

¹⁶ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 445.

¹⁷ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4.

appears to have chosen to interpret B F" (D" NZ as an attributive phrase, 'every scripture' rather than 'all scripture.' To support his adoption of this interpretive conclusion, Barr argues from the standpoint of the author's intent:

Certainly for him there was a body of 'scripture,' and this scripture was inspired; but he shows no interest in defining which books were within it. It is possible that like other New Testament writers he was referring mainly to Old Testament books, which were the pre-existing scripture for early Christianity. . . . It is highly improbable that the writer had in mind exactly the same collection of New Testament books that we now have. Within older scripture, likewise, it is possible that some books within our present Old Testament were included by him. It is highly likely that he included other books which were accepted as religiously edifying or authoritative at the time and which had been counted as 'sacred writings' in Timothy's upbringing.¹⁹

As a result, Barr concludes that II Timothy 3:16 highlights that these "sacred writings - undefined - are inspired, they can be relied on to build up the reader in the Christian life and to supply his needs."²⁰ He argues further:

It is absolutely certain that II Tim. 3.16 cannot be taken as a clearly delimited definition of the unique inspiration of the sixty-six books of the modern Protestant canon. The idea is not that of a quality that attached uniquely to a precisely defined set of books: it is rather a quality that is possessed by the entire body of writings upon which Timothy has been educated and which are recognized in the church as religiously wholesome and authoritative.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

²¹ Ibid., 4.

In summary, Barr argues that the meaning of $\text{B } \text{F}''$ ($\text{D}'' \text{NZ}$) is ambiguous and broad. Furthermore, it probably excludes some of the Old Testament canon as we know it and probably includes a variety of other non-canonical writings. Therefore, there is nothing to indicate that it should be linked to the sixty-six books of the modern Protestant canon. Consequently, II Timothy 3:16 should not be interpreted as making any special claim about the nature of a specific body of sacred literature. In essence, Barr submits that this verse, is simply a general statement about the spiritual value of *some body of sacred writings* known to Timothy. This interpretive conclusion posits a foundation for Barr's view of "scripture" we will see later.

Critique of Barr's Conclusions on $\text{A } \text{H}/\text{A } \text{F}'' / \text{A } \text{F}'' ' \text{D}'' \text{NZ}$

Barr's interpretive decisions on the meaning of $\text{B } \text{F}''$ and ($\text{D}'' \text{NZ}$) seem to create hermeneutical difficulties which tend to violate the grammar as well as the contextual meaning of this phrase, $\text{B } \text{F}''$ ($\text{D}'' \text{NZ}$). He overlooks some important grammatical constructions of this phrase. Firstly, to push $\text{B } \text{F}''$ to mean 'every' whenever the article is absent is exegetically unsound.²² Passages such as Acts 2:36 ' $\text{B } \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} [\text{F} \text{D}''] \text{H} \text{H} \text{H}$ - 8 - *all house of Israel;*' Rom. 11:26 ' $\text{B } \text{H} [\text{F} \text{D}''] \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H}$ 4 - *all Israel will be saved;*' Eph. 2:21 ' $\text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H} \text{H}$ - *in whom all building;*'

²² For a technical discussion on $\text{B } \text{H}$ with or without the article, see Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 119.

and Col. 4:12 ‘ὅτι ἡ ἐπιτομή τοῦ σώματος οὐκ ἐστὶν ἐν ὅλῃ τῆς θεοῦ’ - in all will of God’ demonstrate that ἡ ἐπιτομή does not always mean 'every' without the article.²³ Secondly, in the New Testament, (ὅλη ἡ γραφή is used exclusively with a sacred meaning of Holy Scripture - both “the individual Scripture passage” and “Scripture as a whole.”²⁴ Contrary to Barr's view, it is possible that such "Scripture" constitutes a defined, rather than an ambiguous, body of literature. Therefore, it appears there is good reason to propose that ἡ ἐπιτομή (ὅλη ἡ γραφή should be understood as a reference to a specific or defined body of sacred writings, that is, Holy Scripture. The point we are advancing here is that (ὅλη ἡ γραφή is actually a direct reference to a defined body of sacred literature,²⁵ and thus, ἡ ἐπιτομή ἡ γραφή becomes a modifier of this definite body of writings. Moreover, since the New Testament use of (ὅλη ἡ γραφή refers exclusively to the Holy Scriptures, to apply (ὅλη ἡ γραφή as a reference to an ambiguous and authoritative body of sacred writings would contradict its New Testament usage. It seems logical to conclude that II Tim. 3:16-17 is saying ‘all scripture, whether in all its parts or in its totality,’ as understood in the New Testament, is indeed God-breathed. Technically, the choice between "every Scripture" and "all Scripture" is of

²³ Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 163.

²⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 166. In all its 51 occurrences in the New Testament, (ὅλη ἡ γραφή refers to Holy Scripture. See Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, and Kurt Aland, ed. *Konkordanz zum Novum Testamentum Graece* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 342-343.

²⁵ See George V. Wigram, *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster, 1903), 124-125. In the New Testament, (ὅλη ἡ γραφή is exclusively used with a sacred meaning of Holy Scripture.

minimal significance because if every Scripture is God-breathed, it goes without saying that all Scripture is God-breathed. The resultant nature and origin of “the Scriptures” is accented here. Furthermore, the unique source of “the Scriptures” is highlighted, thus singling out the source of the Scriptures, (D' NZ, from the source of other *non*-(D' NZ writings. Therefore, we may conclude that only Holy Scripture is God-breathed. In this book of II Timothy, Paul makes several other references to teaching and preaching the Scriptures (cf. 2:2, 14, 15, 24; 4:2). Certainly, it would be improper to label this "scripture" ambiguous and undefined because this is a definite body of 'holy writings.' Strictly, in its context, B F" (D' NZ may be understood as an expansion of the previous references to the Old Testament in I Timothy as a defined body of sacred writings²⁶ since the Old Testament was really the text of the New Testament. Actually, this understanding "provides a reason for Paul's use of B F" and for his change from Ê D (DVµµ" J" , an OT designation, to B F" (D' NZ, a possibly more inclusive term."²⁷ Moreover, it is very unlikely that Paul would have referred to this defined 'scripture,' as an undefined and ambiguous body of literature as Barr purports it to be. In addition, Knight is correct when he concludes that Paul's statement (in II Tim. 3:16-17) is not that certain (D' NZ are God-breathed, but that 'all' (D' NZ are God-breathed.²⁸ Again, the spot light is on the resultant origin of the Scriptures, that is, they are God-breathed.

²⁶ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 448.

²⁷ Ibid. See II Tim. 3:15, Ê D (DVµµ" J" @É" H

²⁸ Ibid.

Therefore, at best Barr's interpretive conclusions on B F" (D" NZ appear less likely than the alternative. More importantly still, Barr's interpretations on the meaning of B F" (D" NZ seem to be inconsistent with the larger body of sacred Scripture we have in the rest of the New Testament,²⁹ where we see that the use of B F" (D" NZ highlights the uniqueness of the origin of Scripture.

Issue Two: The Meaning of 1, ` B<, LFJ@H

The second key exegetical issue raised in II Timothy 3:16-17 concerns the precise meaning and implications of 2, ` B<, LFJ@H What does this word tell us about the nature of Scripture?

Barr's Treatment of 1, ` B<, LFJ@H

Barr concludes that II Timothy 3:16 is the only "explicit reference to the 'inspiration' of 'scripture.'"³⁰ Here, Barr's focus is on the fact that the word 2, ` B<, LFJ@H is a hapax legomenon. Therefore, he argues that we must not over interpret or read into its meaning without warrant.³¹ Commenting on the term 2, ` B<, LFJ@H 'God-breathed,' Barr

²⁹ See Nestle-Aland, *Konordanz Novum Testamentum Graece*, 342-343.

³⁰ Barr, *Scope*, 119.

³¹ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 3-4. Barr argues, "The idea that II Tim. 3.16, because of its utterance about inspiration of scripture, was laying the foundation for a Christianity of evangelical-fundamentalist type arises from a simple cause: it arises from the practise of reading single texts in isolation from their context. At one time, this passage could pass as a proof-text; but, for anyone who prizes the reading of

explains:

The wording does not make it clear whether the writer thinks of the past or of the present, of the origin of scripture or of its present mode of operation. Does he mean that God 'breathed' in, or into, the original production of it, or does he mean that he now 'breathes' through it? Probably we cannot tell, and the reason is simple: probably the writer had no thought of the question.³²

Hence, he concludes that "one of the peculiarities of scripture was that by the nature of its own formation it obscured its own earlier history."³³ Furthermore, although the term appears in the Bible in II Timothy 3:16, he does not consider the epistle of II Timothy to be a central biblical document. He argues:

One other point: it is highly significant that the inspiration of scripture received explicit mention not only rarely (indeed here only) but also on the margin rather than in the centre of the New Testament.³⁴

He elucidates this point further:

I have just indicated how thin is the evidence, within the Bible itself, for any such belief: the famous text in which inspiration is mentioned, II Tim. 3.16, is a fairly marginal source, and it makes no connection whatever between inspiration and historical accuracy, it leaves it quite vague which books were the 'scriptures' under discussion, and above all it is notable for its low-key

passages in their context, it must be clear that the interests of the letter lay elsewhere."

³² Ibid., 1-2.

³³ Barr, *Scope*, 115.

³⁴ Ibid., 4.

treatment of the matter: though it says that all scripture is inspired, it does not for a moment suggest that this is the foundation of Christian doctrine or practice, all it says is that scripture, being inspired is 'profitable' for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. In other words, the inspiration of scripture, as defined in this famous text, has nothing to do with the accuracy of scripture or its primacy as the foundation of all doctrine, it is concerned with its practical effects as a 'useful' source of moral correction.³⁵

Here, Barr presents three exegetical conclusions. Firstly, he concludes that we cannot tell whether 2, `B<, LFJ@H indicates the origin of the writings referred to in this passage or their present mode of operation. Therefore, because of its ambiguity, 2, `B<, LFJ@H cannot bear substantial interpretive weight in the question under consideration. Consequently, it is evident from his writings that he does not give the word 2, `B<, LFJ@H its syntactical attention in relation to (D' NZ. Secondly, the 'term' does not carry any indications of infallibility or inerrancy. Lastly, he concludes that the book of II Timothy is a "marginal source of the New Testament."

Critique of Barr's Treatment of 1, `B<, LFJ@H

Barr unfairly deprives 2, `B<, LFJ@H of its rightful theological content and implications to the doctrine of inspiration. Indeed, the word is a hapax legomenon, but it embodies a distinct image of the Scriptures worth noting. There are three points we raise about Barr's conclusions on 2, `B<, LFJ@H and its related interpretive significance.

³⁵ Ibid., 63.

Firstly, Barr fails to weigh, if not deliberately avoids, the theological significance of $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ in his treatment of this text. Indeed, $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ is a unique biblical term.³⁶ It rightly highlights the divine authorship or source of Scripture. The term $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ refers to the character of Scripture not to the mode in which Scripture came into existence.³⁷ Thus $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ is a special term that highlights the origin as well as the resultant nature and quality of scripture: "All Scripture is God-breathed." Therefore, to advance that $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ is an ambiguous term would fit sound logic.³⁸

The term $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ itself puts the spotlight on the fact that God is the source, the origin of the writings under consideration in II Timothy 3:16. There seems to be good reason to suggest that $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ is to be applied to all Scripture, that is, "all Scripture is God-breathed." Indeed, $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ affirms the divine origin of the Scriptures. The term reflects God's creative activity in the production of the Scriptures,³⁹ that is, He is the source of the Scriptures.

³⁶ See Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 679. Considering the meaning of $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$, "breathe out," the Scriptures, the Old Testament in this case, are understood to be God's words in written form. Grudem is probably correct when he proposes that "since it is the writings that are said to be "breathed out," this breathing must be understood as a metaphor for speaking," (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, 39).

³⁷ For further detail 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), 55.

³⁸ Ibid., 1-2.

³⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody: Hendricksen Publishers, 1984), 279.

Furthermore, because of the resultant origin of this Scripture, that is, it is "God-breathed," it seems logical to infer the accuracy, infallibility, and authority of Scripture. Hence, the evangelical camp subscribes to the Scriptures as the standard for measuring what Christians ought to believe and how they ought to conduct themselves on this side of eternity.

Secondly, it is evident that Barr does not view the Bible as a direct reference to the source of all scripture when he concludes that "the Bible does not have the property of perfection, which belongs only to God himself."⁴⁰ Actually, he believes that inspiration of Scripture, as defined in II Timothy 3:16, "has nothing to do with accuracy or its primacy as the foundation of all doctrine, . . ."⁴¹ On the contrary, we believe that Scripture is God-breathed, thus giving the Scriptures authority and trustworthiness as the standard for truth.⁴² In the larger context, the attitude of Bible authors toward the nature of the Bible is rather clear. The Bible's words were viewed as the words of God.⁴³ Knight rightly comments on the essential characteristics of God's breath as the ultimate

⁴⁰ Barr, *Scope*, 55.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴² Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 20-21.

⁴³ Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," 39. Grudem points out, "The Old Testament writings are regarded as God's words in written form. God is the one who spoke (and still speaks) them, although using human agents to write them down." See also Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" 50-52. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, there is clear consciousness on the part of the Bible authors that what they wrote or said was on par with the revelation, the Pentateuch - *the Torah*, God had given previously. Individuals like Moses, David, Elijah, Paul, Peter, Timothy, et cetera, confirm this point.

source of all scripture:

This is another way of saying that scripture is God's word (cf. Jesus' use of "scripture" and "word of God" in apposition to each other in Jn. 10:35). The same thing is also said when the NT uses "God says" for what is found in scripture, whether the words were originally spoken by God or not (see Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 299-348) and when Paul insists that the message he speaks consists of words taught by God's Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12-13; cf. Heb. 3:7; Acts 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:21).⁴⁴

There is an abundance of related biblical data that espouse this perception of the identity of God's words with the words of Scripture. According to Archer, the term 'God-breathed' implies God's personal involvement, controlling, and guiding the human authors to "write down just exactly what God intended them to write."⁴⁵ Archer is probably correct in making such a tight link between God's involvement in the lives of the human authors and the nature of the final document they produced under God's supervision.

However, Barr is absolutely correct to point out that 2, `B<, LFJ@H as it stands in II Tim. 3:16, has nothing to do with accuracy or infallibility of the Scriptures.⁴⁶ Indeed, although inerrancy or infallibility is pertinent to the doctrine of Scripture, it is not the focus of the text. Nevertheless, for Barr to raise this point here is rather confusing because there is no textual basis to warrant such an argument. Actually,

⁴⁴ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 447.

⁴⁵ Archer, *Bible Difficulties*, 417.

⁴⁶ Barr, *Scope*, 63.

his view appears to be eisegetically driven since the infallibility of scripture is not even an exegetical issue raised directly by the passage under consideration. However, in chapter five, the section dealing with biblical authority issue, we will analyse Barr's reasons for this reference to infallibility of Scripture.

Thirdly, Barr's questioning of the significance and authority of the book of II Timothy as a New Testament document violates his emphasis on the believing community as having interpretive authority.⁴⁷ Over the past hundreds of years of Church tradition, the book of II Timothy has neither been questioned nor considered to be a "marginal source" of the New Testament.⁴⁸ It is true that (D" NZ in II Timothy 3:16 refers to the Old Testament. However, (D" NZ should not be limited to the Old Testament. This seems to be the view the apostle Peter had when he says, “. . . just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of those matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other, (D" N I, Scriptures, to their own destruction,” II Peter 3:15-16. Paul's letters (writings) are placed in the same category as (D" NZ.

Therefore, Towner is correct when he extends (D" NZ to embrace the New Testament as well. He explains:

⁴⁷ Ibid., 111. Barr says, "The Bible takes its origin from within the continuing life of these communities; the standard of its religious interpretation is the structure of faith which these communities maintain; and it has the task of providing a challenge, a force for innovation and a source of purification to the life of these communities."

⁴⁸ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1011.

Paul has in mind the Old Testament Scriptures, not because the apostles' teaching lacked authority but probably because the opponents had so misused them. At that time the Old Testament represented the revelation of God, His communication to human beings, that had been written down; but it is certainly correct to extend His meaning to include the New Testament.⁴⁹

If "all scripture" - both Old and New Testament, is indeed "God-breathed" as we have already established, Barr's view of regarding the book of II Timothy as a "marginal source" becomes an unlikely interpretive conclusion. His position reflects acceptance of the popularized historical-critical view of authorship and dating, a judgment not drawn from within Scripture as such. In a word, this "late and marginal source" argument posited by conventional critical theories lacks scriptural or textual support. The point we are making here is that persuasive theological conclusions should be based on sound exegesis or contextual considerations. Barr's view displays the presuppositions that shape his view of Scripture. This topic will be dealt with in chapter five. However, we see that Barr's theological decision to regard the book of II Timothy as a "late and marginal document" would be contrary to the New Testament understanding of (D' NZ and 2, ` B<, LFJ@H⁵⁰ It becomes unclear why a

⁴⁹ Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 200. See also Vine, Unger, White, "Scripture" *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985, 552. "Graph' - of the OT Scriptures (those accepted by the Jews as canonical) and all those of the NT which were to be accepted by Christians as authoritative, 2 Tim. 3:16; these latter were to be discriminated from the many forged epistles and other religious 'writings' already produced and circulated in Timothy's time."

⁵⁰ See Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 679.

Church tradition preserved for centuries should suddenly be deemed wrong by a twentieth-century scholar. Obviously, Barr's views are not equivocal because of their incongruity with the conventional ethos. We are not advocating that Church tradition, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy, is always right. In fact, Barr challenges us to see the need to be analytical and critical of our ways of doing theology, especially with the knowledge of the strength of our theological traditions. This is not an easy task at all because our presuppositions are always tinted by our theological traditions. Thus, we agree that "religious tradition, however, is not always a good thing. When it attempts to stifle all development and every attempt at rethinking one's cultural or religious heritage, tradition becomes something that is impoverishing rather than enriching."⁵¹ Again, Barr's interpretive decision to view the book of II Timothy as a "late and marginal document" reflects his presuppositions on the nature of the Scriptures, an area that will be dealt with in greater detail in chapter five.

In summary, we conclude that the meaning of $\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu\sigma\mu\alpha$ in this passage suggests a clear picture that expresses vivid truth about the nature and origin of scripture. Furthermore, the use of the term $\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu\sigma\mu\alpha$ is intensified when it is understood in the context of a body of literature that accords the highest respect to the Scriptures. We propose that $\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu\sigma\mu\alpha$ be understood as a direct reference to a defined body of sacred literature distinct from non- $\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu\sigma\mu\alpha$ which would not be God-

⁵¹ Hill, Brennan, Paul Knitter and William Madges, *Faith, Religion and Theology: A Contemporary Introduction "Approaches to Scripture and Tradition"* Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990, 272.

breathed.

Issue Three: How 1, ` B<, LFJ@H Relates to ' D" NZ

In the past, those who have limited themselves to the English text (Bible) have presented this issue as the placement of the implied missing verb, |FJ\<.⁵² Where in the verse should we supply |FJ\<: after (D" NZ or after 2, ` B<, LFJ@H? These two different placements lead to two entirely different meanings and conclusions. Supplying the understood verb |FJ\< after (D" NZ reads "Scripture is God-breathed. . . ." If placed after 2, ` B<, LFJ@H it would read "God-breathed scripture is. . . ." ⁵³ The placement of this implied verb |FJ\<, either favours or implies a defined body of scripture or an undefined body of scripture. Another related translational issue becomes the grammatical purpose of 6" \, whether it serves as "a conjunction between 2, ` B<, LFJ@H and éNX84u@H (God-breathed and profitable)" or as an adjunctive adverb "also" ("God-breathed scripture is also profitable").⁵⁴

Indeed, the placement of the implied verb |FJ\< and the grammatical purpose of 6" \ influence our understanding of the meaning of this passage. These are crucial issues that need to be addressed as we seek to establish the meaning of this passage. A more direct way of approaching these pertinent and crucial exegetical issues in this text

⁵² Corley, "Biblical Teaching," 451.

⁵³ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 444.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

would be: How does λ relate to $(D)N$? Is λ an attributive adjective or a predicate adjective? If λ is attributive it attributes something to $(D)N$, "all/every God-breathed Scripture (is) . . ." If λ is predicate it predicates something to $(D)N$, "all/every Scripture (is) God-breathed. . . ." One's exegetical decision leads to two distinct interpretive conclusions about the meaning of this text.

How then does Barr settle this key issue in II Timothy 3:16 on the syntactical relationship between λ and $(D)N$? What interpretive approaches does he adopt in establishing his conclusions?

Barr's Answer to How λ Relates to $(D)N$

Based on his writing, it seems Barr has adopted the view that understands λ attributively, thus interpreting $B F (D)N$ λ to mean "every/all God-breathed scripture is profitable" since he believes that there are some other scriptures not included or ignored in our present Bible that were also religiously useful and authoritative.⁵⁵ A prima-facie observation appears to lead to the conclusion that he understands $B F (D)N$ λ predicately, but his conclusions reveal otherwise.

Barr concludes that II Timothy 3:16-17 is not directing us to a specific inspired body of sacred scripture but rather stating that these

⁵⁵ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 4.

"sacred writings--undefined--are inspired,"⁵⁶ and are also profitable. Furthermore, from his writing it appears that he understands 2, `B<, LFJ@H has an adjective in the attributive slot when he says:

The idea is not that of a quality that attaches uniquely to a precisely defined set of books: it is rather a quality that is possessed by the entire body of writings upon which Timothy has been educated and which are recognized in the church as religiously wholesome and authoritative.⁵⁷

Hence, he concludes that the author of II Timothy did not define the concept of inspiration because he meant not to explain it for us. According to Barr, Paul mentions the inspiration of scripture "almost in passing."⁵⁸ As a result, commenting on the meaning and significance of 2, `B<, LFJ@H and how it relates to (D" NZ as indicated in II Timothy 3:16-17, Barr says that "because these sacred writings--undefined--are inspired, they can be relied on to build the reader in the Christian life and to supply his needs."⁵⁹ He appears to portray the view that understands the relationship between (D" NZ and 2, `B<, LFJ@H in the predicate structure. However, his interpretive conclusions show that he favours the attributive view. Commenting on his understanding of the scope and primary emphasis of II Timothy 3:16-17, Barr asserts:

Why is it important, according to II Timothy, that scripture is inspired?
Because of its practical effects, in teaching and training. Used in this way, it

⁵⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁷ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

conduces to righteousness. It equips the man of God for every good work: that is, its effect is ethically beneficial.⁶⁰

Barr is correct when he concludes that the emphasis of II Timothy 3:16-17 is on the practical effects of Scripture. Indeed, this is an important point in Paul's mind as indicated in verse 15, "and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings (ἅγια γράμματα, Holy Scriptures) that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." However, there are two points Paul highlights in II Timothy 3:16-17: (1) he is making a statement about the source of the Scriptures, that is, it is God-breathed, and (2) because Scripture is God-breathed, it is useful. Towner is on target when he concludes that "the divine origin of scripture ensures its usefulness in leading to salvation (v.15) and for teaching and training (v.16-17)."⁶¹ In a word, the usefulness or effectiveness of the Scriptures depends on their divine origin. This is a two-fold emphasis that should not be overlooked. Indeed, the two points are inseparable. This seems to be Barr's oversight here. He concludes that the primary concern of the passage is basically the effectiveness (usefulness) of Scripture without acknowledging the basis for such usefulness, which, in this case, is the resultant origin of the Scriptures, 2, ἅγια γράμματα

Therefore, according to Barr, ἐπιχρησима (profitable or useful) must be understood in the same weaker sense as 2, ἅγια γράμματα without the significant or much weightier concepts of inspiration and authority

⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁶¹ Towner, *1-2 Timothy*, 200-201.

that are common in current Protestant theology.⁶² In addition, he concludes that it "serves as an adjunctive adverb to read "All/every God-breathed scripture is also profitable. . . ."⁶³

Critique of Barr's Answer to How 2, ̅ B<, LFJ@H Relates to ' D' NZ

We have already established that the placement of the implied verb ̅FJ< is basically a translational issue (the English text trying to make sense of the Greek text) relative to the main exegetical issue of how (D' NZ and 2, ̅ B<, LFJ@H are related. Is 2, ̅ B<, LFJ@H an adjective in the attributive slot or an adjective in the predicate slot? Here, we propose that this is the key exegetical issue of this passage upon which its entire interpretation hangs.

We have already observed that there are at least two possible ways of solving this issue: In the attributive, the adjective (2, ̅ B<, LFJ@H) is understood grammatically as supplying a statement about some body of material in the sentence. In the predicate, the adjective (2, ̅ B<, LFJ@H) is making a pronouncement about the subject, which is essentially the primary purpose of the sentence.⁶⁴

From the syntax of our text, B F" (D' N- 2, ̅ B<, LFJ@H . . . , we

⁶² Ibid., 4-5.

⁶³ Barr, *Scope*, 119. "The scope of the inspiration of scripture is essentially *practical*: scripture is 'profitable' (a very low-key word, strikingly contrasted with what has been made of this text in later times) for teaching, for correction, for training in righteousness, in order that the man of God may be complete and well equipped."

⁶⁴ For further discussion see William D. Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1941), 42-46.

observe that $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ does not follow an article. Actually, there is no article in the construction. $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ also agrees in case, gender, and number with $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ which it modifies. In addition, if there was an article before $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ this would have been certainly attributive.⁶⁵

To make the attributive/predicate issue clearer here, we are proposing that the adjective $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ should be understood predicatively based on the following three reasons: First, the position or location of the adjective $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ in the sentence does not support the attributive structure.⁶⁶ Exegetically, the presence of the adjective without the copula favours the predicate understanding.⁶⁷ Therefore, we propose that $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ be understood as an adjective in the predicate slot. Second, again, we propose that $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ ("all, every or the whole Scripture," should be understood as referring to a definite body of sacred literature. It would be unlikely for Paul to employ $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ as a reference to an ambiguous or undefined body of sacred writings. Therefore, $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ becomes analogous to an articular construction which yields, in effect, a predicative syntax for $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ that is, no-article-adjective. It seems more likely that since both $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ and $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ are exegetically related as adjectives, logically yields only a

⁶⁵ See A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 656.

⁶⁶ Chamberlain, *Exegetical Grammar*, 41.

⁶⁷ See Robertson, *Grammar*, 656. See also A.T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1931), 277. "An adjective may be attributive (instead of predicate) without the article as in $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ (I Cor. 5:6) *a little leaven*. But if the article is used before the adjective it is certainly attributive like $\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\iota$ (Matt. 12:35) *the good*

predicate usage in their contexts. The point here is if B F" (D" NZ is "definite" by virtue of B F" and (D" NZ (B F" (D" NZ as tantamount to a proper noun), then the adjective 2, `B<, LFJ@H must be predicate as must éNX84u@H. The third point concerns the probability that 2, `B<, LFJ@H and éNX84u@H would have to stand in the same syntactical relation to (D" NZ and that they would, therefore, be either predicate or attributive. We have proposed that there is more evidence to hold 2, `B<, LFJ@H and éNX84u@H as predicating something to (D" NZ than understanding it attributively. As a result, it seems the predicate view would be more unlikely than the alternative.

To sum up, 2, `B<, LFJ@H should be viewed as an adjective in the predicate slot. It is making a declaration about (D" NZ, that is, "all/every scripture (is) God-breathed. . . ." The origin or source of scripture as well as its usefulness become the two key points of emphasis in this text. In this regard, the predicate view is an exegetically convincing view over the attributive position. Therefore, we may confidently conclude that Scripture is both inspired and profitable. In other words, because the origin of the Scriptures is God, 2, `B<, LFJ@H they are useful for guiding Christian faith and practice. Fee is correct when he concludes that II Timothy 3:16-17 makes two affirmations: Scripture is God-breathed and Scripture is useful.⁶⁸

We believe that a proper study of II Timothy 3:16-17 leads the exegete to embrace the conviction of the Scripture it embodies. Knight is

man."

⁶⁸ Fee, *NIBC: 1 and 2 Timothy*, 279.

right when he elaborates:

Its particular significance lies in its absoluteness, first that relating to the extent of scripture (B F" (D" NZ) and second that relating to the character of scripture (2, ` B<, LFJ@H). Because "all scripture is God-breathed" Paul can state categorically that it is "useful for teaching, . . ." and that as a result of its fourfold work in one's life that "the man of God" is adequate and equipped (v.17).⁶⁹

II Peter 1:20-21

The other passage Barr evaluates in his attempt to establish his preferred view of biblical inspiration is II Peter 1:20-21. The purpose of the next section is to analyse critically Barr's interpretive conclusions on II Peter 1:20-21. The section will begin with a brief overview of the exegetical issues raised in this passage. Next, Barr's interpretive conclusions on these exegetical issues will be examined. Finally, it will conclude with a critique of his interpretive conclusions on II Peter 1:20-21.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (NIV)

J@Q@ BDä J@< (4f F6@<, H Ó4 B F" BD@NOJ, \ " (D" N-H Æ\ " H
!B48bF, TH@J (\<, J" 4q @J (D 2, 8Zµ" J4• <2Df B@ 2 <XP20 BD@NOJ, \ "
B@X, • 88 ßBÍ B<, bµ" J@H (\@L N, D' µ, <@4 !8V80F" < • BÍ 2, @Ø

⁶⁹ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 447.

- <2DT B@4

Church tradition, *the believing community*,⁷⁰ and evangelical scholarship have usually understood II Peter 1:20-21 to be supporting the divine origin (inspiration) of the Scriptures. Commenting on the passage's contribution to our understanding of biblical inspiration, Erickson remarks:

Here Peter is affirming that the prophecies of the Old Testament were not of human origin. They were not produced by the will or decision of man. Rather they were moved or borne along (N, D@u, <@4) by the Spirit of God. The impetus which led to the writing was from the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Peter's readers are to pay heed to the prophetic word, for it is not simply man's word, but God's word.⁷¹

Erickson comments further that Peter's reference to the 'prophetic word' (2 Peter 1:19) and every 'prophecy of scripture' (v.20) leads us to conclude that "the whole of the collection of writings commonly accepted in that day is in view."⁷² Warfield also concurs with this view that the "prophetic word" refers to the Scriptures.⁷³

Overview of Exegetical Issues in II Peter 1:20-21

⁷⁰ See Barr, *Scope*, 112. He prefers this label for the people of God.

⁷¹ Erickson, *Theology*, 201.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 210.

⁷³ Warfield, *Inspiration*, 135.

Firstly, our understanding of the key clause $\beta\ \delta\ \nu\ \omicron\ \iota$ ($\delta\ \nu\ \omicron\ \iota\ \beta\ \delta\ \nu\ \omicron\ \iota\ \beta\ \delta\ \nu\ \omicron\ \iota$) ultimately determines our interpretive conclusions on the meaning of the passage. There are two dominant interpretations of this clause: (1) "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation," that is, the church must interpret prophecy, the interpretation should be that intended by the Holy Spirit or the individual's interpretation is not to be private; and (2) "no prophecy of Scripture derives from the prophet's own interpretation."⁷⁴ In other words, the key interpretive issues here are whether the primary concern of the main clause is referring to: (1) the interpretation of prophecy of scripture; (2) the source of prophecy of scripture;⁷⁵ (3) the divine operation in the production of scripture; or (4) the divine origin or source of the prophecy.

Secondly, attention should also be given to the meaning of $\beta\ \delta\ \nu\ \omicron\ \iota$ a hapax legomenon. What does $\beta\ \delta\ \nu\ \omicron\ \iota$ refer to in this text: the contemporary interpretation/exegesis in general or that of the original author of the prophecy? In addition, the connection or the relationship between $\beta\ \delta\ \nu\ \omicron\ \iota$ and $\beta\ \delta\ \nu\ \omicron\ \iota$ should be defined.

Therefore, since word meanings depend as much on their usage in the clause as the clause depends on the word meanings, we shall seek to understand this passage within its context.

⁷⁴ Richard J. Bauckham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1983), 229.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Issue One: The Meaning of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon$ Hand $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon$, T H

These two words are syntactically related in that they are both in the genitive case. It is crucial to note that, with genitives, it is the item restricted which might be placed in the genitive case, or the item in the genitive case might be restricting something else.⁷⁶ As a result, the exegetical conclusions on one affects the other.

Firstly, there is a general agreement on the meaning of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon$ H that is, it refers to "someone's own" and not the Spirit's interpretation.⁷⁷ However, as already pointed out, it is not clear whether $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon$ H means "one's own" or "the prophet's own."⁷⁸ An exegetical decision must be made here. There are two dominant interpretations of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon$ H in this text: (1) No prophecy of Scripture comes out of the prophet's own interpretation since its source is God, or (2) No prophecy of Scripture is to be privately interpreted since interpretation of prophecy is a task of the believing community, the Church.⁷⁹ As Green puts it, "In the first case it is the prophet's understanding of his prophecy which is the issue, in the second it is our interpretation of the prophet's words"⁸⁰ under consideration. Obviously, favouring one choice over the other affects the

⁷⁶ Porter, *Idioms of the NT*, 92. However, in any case, Greek grammarians agree that the essential feature of the genitive case is restriction. See also Blass, F, A Debrunner and R.W. Funk, trans. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961, 83-100.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Green, *2 Peter*, 89-90.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

interpretation of the passage. Where then, does the spotlight fall in the text? Does the accent fall on the prophet's own interpretation or on one's own present exegetical or interpretive approaches? Secondly, a related interpretive issue concerns the meaning of זָּרַחַת and how it relates to זָּרַחַת .⁸¹ What does זָּרַחַת mean within its contextual canonical framework?

In the light of these exegetical issues, what approaches does Barr adopt on the meaning and syntax of זָּרַחַת ?

Barr's Conclusions on the Meaning of זָּרַחַת

Barr makes his interpretive conclusions on the meaning of זָּרַחַת evident when he says the author insists "that the understanding of scripture, or of prophecy, is not a matter of one's own interpretation."⁸² In other words, he adopts the view that a proper study of זָּרַחַת should lead to the conclusion that the author is concerned about the significance of proper interpretation of prophecy of scripture. Barr's interpretive conclusion is even clearer when he says:

⁸¹ Bauckham, *2 Peter*, 230-231.

⁸² Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 5.

The interpretation of prophetic scripture is not something that the individual can legitimately do. It is a matter therefore that lies in the hands of the church community and its tradition of understanding. The writer is concerned by the outgrowth of wild and undisciplined interpretations of prophecy, with their consequent violent effects upon the Christian expectation of the end of the world.⁸³

In addition, considering that "the prophecies came not by human impulse, but through the movement of the Holy Spirit, therefore they are not a matter for private interpretation."⁸⁴ According to Barr, this passage stresses that the believing community should take responsibility for interpreting the Scriptures as opposed to individual interpretations of the Scriptures.

Critique of Barr's Conclusions on 2 Peter 1:20-21

Barr's interpretive decision on the meaning of 2 Peter 1:20-21 within its context lacks convincing biblical support. He believes that the primary concern under consideration here is the interpretation of the prophecy of scripture and not the origin of it.⁸⁵ Indeed, we realize and acknowledge that some scholars have adopted a similar interpretive conclusion about the essence of this text.⁸⁶ Hence, others have attempted

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 6-7.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁶ Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Anchor Bible: 2 Peter, Jude* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1993), 182. "The issue in 1:20-21, however, is not the source of prophecy but its interpretation."

to offer various interpretations of ἡ ἐκείνη ἡ ἐκείνη ἡ ἐκείνη.⁸⁷ However, it seems these various views, including Barr's, appear to be less likely in view of the context of the biblical data under consideration.⁸⁸ Indeed, the fact that ἡ ἐκείνη ἡ ἐκείνη ἡ ἐκείνη "interpretation, analysis," is a hapax legomenon⁸⁹ contributes to our difficulty in understanding its meaning. In addition, the verb ἐκείνη, "to loosen, interpret, or settle,"⁹⁰ appears only twice in its related forms in the New Testament, that is, Mark 4:34 and Acts 19:39.⁹¹

Grammatically, here, ἡ ἐκείνη ἡ ἐκείνη ἡ ἐκείνη is in the genitive case. Thus, either the item in the genitive case is restricted or the item restricted may be the one placed in the genitive case. In other words, "*the essential semantic feature of the genitive case is restriction.*"⁹² Such an understanding of the genitive is quite different from the merely

⁸⁷ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville: Unusual Publications, 1989), 82. There are four different views proposed on the meaning of ἡ ἐκείνη ἡ ἐκείνη ἡ ἐκείνη (1) The individual (private) believer does not have the ability to interpret prophecy and so needs ecclesiastical direction; (2) One must not interpret a prophecy in isolation without the light of its unfolding fulfilment; (3) Prophetic predictions should not be interpreted in isolation from other scriptures; and (4) It is not the individual but the Holy Spirit who must interpret prophecy, as well as inspire it.

⁸⁸ Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of St. Peter* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 112. See also Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 182 and Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 234.

⁸⁹ See J.B. Smith, *Greek-English Concordance* (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955), 144.

⁹⁰ See Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, ed. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 31.

⁹¹ *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, London: Samuel Bagster & Sons Ltd, 1794, 158. See also Smith, *Concordance*, 144. In Mark 4:34 it is used of interpretation of a parable, and in Acts 19:39 it refers to a decision in the regular assembly of the people.

⁹² Porter, *Idioms of the Greek NT*, 92.

descriptive function that views the genitive very much like an adjective.⁹³

The question then is: How is the genitive ἡ γενεῆς λειτουργία functioning? There are various categories for the genitive which include: quality, definition, or description; partitive; possession, ownership, origin or source; apposition; objective; subjective; comparison; time or space; and object.⁹⁴ The key observation here is that ἡ γενεῆς λειτουργία seems to fit more into the *origin/source* use than all other categories. Commenting on the classification of the genitive of possession, ownership, origin or source, Porter explains:

Each of these classificatory terms reveals some sort of dependent or derivative status for the governing (head) term in relation to the word in the genitive. Pronouns are often used in this construction.⁹⁵

In this case, the source of βασιλεία οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς (D^o N-H (*all or every prophecy of scripture*)) becomes a key concept here. Such an understanding follows logically Peter's further explanation in verse 21 of how this prophecy of scripture came about. Here, Peter states that "prophecy of scripture did not occur or emerge from one's own interpretation."

The New International Version interprets ἑαυτοῦ (*one's own*) as referring to the prophet himself, thus making the text read, ". . . no

⁹³ James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham: University Press, 1979), 8.

⁹⁴ Porter, *Idioms of the Greek NT*, 92-97.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation." Although the word "prophet" does not appear in the Greek text, this interpretive decision seems to capture and express a more likely understanding of this text. It is only the context of this phrase that will provide its meaning and syntax here. In other words, according to the author of II Peter 1:20, the main point here is not that interpretation of prophecy of scripture emerged from the prophet himself, "but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God," (v.21) and ἐκ τῆς ἁγίας πνεύματος ἡμῶν ἐλάλησαν ὡς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (II Pet. 1:21). The word ἐκ carries a lot of weight in determining that exegetical connection. ἐκ is serving as an important conjunction in the explanatory sense here. It beautifully links verses 20-21 to the preceding ἐκ τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ, τῶν ἀκριβῶν καὶ μεγάλων ἐπαγγελιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ (II Pet. 1:4). Furthermore, the meaning of ἐκ, J" 4 also supports this *origin* relationship with the scriptural image of prophecy as indicated in II Peter 2:1 where false prophets bring in heresies,⁹⁶ since their source is Satan. In addition, the 113 occurrences of ἐκ in the New Testament denote belonging to an individual, one's own, as opposed to what belongs to another.⁹⁷ The verb ἐκ, J" 4 "marks the axiomatic character of the negation,"⁹⁸ thus making strong evidence to conclude that ἐκ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ προφητείας focuses on the prophet's own interpretation and not just anyone's interpretation of the prophecy of

⁹⁶ Hiebert, *2 Peter*, 82.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 81.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

scripture. Lenski explains:

The fact that ἡ ἐρμηνεία means "interpretation" is beyond question. In Gen. 40:8 it is so used with reference to a dream; in Mark 4:34 the verb is used with reference to parables. The genitive is an ablative (R.514). οὐκ ἐκ τῆς προφητείας does not refer to the prophecy of Scripture and does not convey the idea that this prophecy does not supply its "own interpretation." *Scriptura* undoubtedly *ex Scriptura explicanda est*; in this way the Spirit interprets Scripture. οὐκ ἐκ τῆς προφητείας with its ablative = "does not occur from," come or originate from. It is not the interpretation of anyone that governs the prophecy, but the prophecy governs the interpretation.⁹⁹

Indeed, verse 21 introduces a very clear declaration,¹⁰⁰ οὐκ ἐκ τῆς προφητείας ἡ προφητεία ἐλάλησεν ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος (not for by [the] will of man was brought prophecy at any time, but [the] Holy Spirit being carried [along] spoke from God men).¹⁰¹

Barr's conclusions about the meaning of II Peter 1:20-21 as an instruction on the interpretation of prophetic scripture as a task of the church community as opposed to individual or private interpretation¹⁰² does not appear to fit the essential thrust of the text. He seems to have

⁹⁹ Richard C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Epistles of Peter, John, and the Epistle of Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1945), 297.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁰¹ See C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of the Greek New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 73. These men spoke what was derived from God. Thus οὐκ ἐκ τῆς προφητείας is reinforcing that God controlled these men as prophecy of Scripture came into being.

¹⁰² Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 5.

taken such an interpretive decision in order to allow himself room to attack premillennial dispensationalism, the production of the Scofield Reference Bible, the veneration of great evangelists, radio pastors and other attention attributed to individuals' works (rather than to the community) within fundamentalism.¹⁰³ Barr believes such regard to individuals disregards the teaching of II Peter 1:20-21 to have the church community interpret the prophetic scripture.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, his point about the fundamentalists' propensity to elevate individuals at the expense of the entire believing community should be carefully noted and taken seriously. However, such an application of this passage cannot be derived from the text under consideration. The text clearly concerns the prophet's own interpretation of prophetic scripture in view of the fact that Scripture did not come into being through the will of man but rather through the active participation of the Holy Spirit.

The interpretation of the prophecy of scripture under consideration here concerns the prophet's own interpretation and not just anyone's interpretation. The point here is that the origin of prophecy of scripture is not the prophet himself. Therefore, to conclude that *Æ\ " H |B48bF, TH* argues for a communal interpretation of the prophecy of scripture would be an eisegetical interpretation of a phrase that best suits as a reference to the origin of prophecy as not coming from an individual but from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Barr's interpretive conclusion does not seem to fit the seemingly proper meaning of this phrase under

¹⁰³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

consideration.

Issue Two: The Primary Meaning of the Main Clause

An exegetical decision must be made in order to establish the meaning of the main clause and its relation to the meaning of the entire passage. What is the main clause highlighting or referring to in light of the essential meaning of this text?

The major task here is to determine whether the passage's main emphasis is on the origin (source) of prophecy of scripture or the interpretation of prophecy of scripture. This is the key exegetical issue that will determine the theological meaning of this text.

Barr's Interpretive Conclusions about II Peter 1:20-21

Commenting on the essential meaning of this passage, Barr concludes:

Important for our writer as the place of scripture is, his emphasis is not on the efficacy of scripture as the controlling force within the church - for scripture can be distorted, can be misunderstood and can mislead, which is the reason why the whole matter arose in the first place – but on the centrality of the church's communal understanding and custom as the locus for the interpretation of scripture. . . . Particularly interesting is the direction of the argument: because the prophecies came not by human impulse, but through the movement of the Holy Spirit, therefore they are not a matter for private

interpretation.¹⁰⁵

He explains further:

One may reasonably ask for the meaning of the biblical text taken in itself; or for the meaning as perceived by scholarship; or for the meaning as perceived by the church as a whole. But if one says that one must follow the evangelical interpretation, or the conservative interpretation, or some other partisan understanding, then one is likely to transgress the guidance of II Peter 1:20-21.¹⁰⁶

Barr also believes that it is not certain that what the author says about prophecy is applicable to scripture in general.¹⁰⁷ In other words, he sees a distinction between the interpretation of prophecy of scripture and the interpretation of scripture in general.

There are two significant observations we make about Barr's understanding of the meaning of II Peter 1:20-21. First, he concludes that a proper study of this text shows the importance of the church's communal task of interpreting scripture as opposed to private, individual interpretation. Second, he advances that we cannot be certain that what the text says about interpretation of prophecy of scripture also applies to the interpretation of scripture in general.

Critique of Barr's Conclusions about II Peter 1:20-21

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 5.

Barr's interpretive conclusions as to the essential meaning of II Peter 1:20-21 are unlikely exegetical decisions. His views do not seem to arise from a convincing exegetical analysis of the text under consideration. His first interpretive conclusion derives from his decision not to identify grammatically that ἡ προφητεία is a genitive in the predicate.¹⁰⁸ This function of the genitive in the predicate favours the origin of prophecy of Scripture rather than its interpretation based on the context because there is “some sort of dependent or derivative status for the governing (head) term in relation to the word in the genitive.”¹⁰⁹ The main focus of this text is on knowing that all prophecy of Scripture is of divine origin. God revealed the Scriptures. Hence, this divinity of the Scriptures must be acknowledged in the first place. Peter's further explanation of the source of prophecy of Scripture in verse 21 argues for such an exegetical decision. To put the spotlight on "one's own" in attempting to emphasize the believing community's interpretation of prophecy of Scripture instead of the source of the prophecy of Scripture would not fit the context and syntax of the text as indicated in verse 21. Indeed, the main thrust of this text is the origin of the prophecy of Scripture according to II Peter 1:21.

In addition, in keeping with good exegesis, we have to bear in mind that the individual terminologies Peter employs in this passage

¹⁰⁸ In other words, the text highlights that the prophet's interpretation of the prophecy of Scripture is anchored in God, who is its author. The prophecy of Scripture did not emerge from the prophet's own volitions. God is the source of Scripture. See Porter, *Idioms of the Greek NT*, 93, for a further explanation on the genitive.

¹⁰⁹ Porter, *Idioms of the Greek NT*, 93.

should be studied in the light of the main teaching of the epistle. Hence, we have to consider the relationship of verse 20 to verse 21 in the light of the context of the passage and the rest of the epistle. Green is correct when he comments:

In the preceding paragraph, Peter is not talking about interpretation but authentication. His theme is the origin and reliability of the Christian teaching about grace, holiness and heaven. The same God whom the apostles heard speak in the transfiguration spoke also through the prophets. Thus the argument in verses 20, 21 is a consistent and indeed necessary conclusion to the preceding paragraph, i.e. we can rely on Scripture because behind its human authors is God. The prophets did not make up what they wrote. They did not arbitrarily unravel it.¹¹⁰

In view of this contextual analysis of II Peter 1:20-21, the accentuation is on the *divine origin of prophecy of Scripture*, not on *its accurate interpretation*. This is a logical conclusion because if interpretation was the author's subject in verse 20, then verse 21 would be utterly irrelevant to his argument. In a word, according to Peter the apostle, the prophecy of Scripture is to be understood and carried out in light of its origin, that is, its divine origin. The Holy Spirit becomes the indispensable guide in our endeavour to analyse and understand Scripture. Hiebert explains:

"For no prophecy ever came by the will of man" sweeps away all false views concerning the origin of prophecy. "Ever" (B@X), placed emphatically at the end of the statement, means "at some time or another in the past." Joined with

¹¹⁰ Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, 90-91. These prophets, in the words of John Calvin, "did not blab their inventions of their own accord or according to their own judgments."

the negative (οὐ) at the beginning, the assertion is that at no time in the past was it true that Biblical prophecy "came by the will of man" (2, 8Zμ" J4 • <2Df B@L ² <XP20 BD@NOJ, \"), was brought to men by what any individual willed. Although the Old Testament prophecy is in view here, "prophecy" (BD@NOJ, \"), used without the article, is sufficiently broad to include New Testament prophecy as well. Only false prophets shaped their prophecies to declare what they wanted to happen.¹¹¹

In addition, by having the participial clause ββί B<, bμ" J@H (\@ N, D' μ, <@ placed before the finite verb ©8V8OF" <, the author highlights that it is the Holy Spirit who is the driving agent in this origination of the prophecy of scripture.¹¹² Commenting on the significance of the passage and its relation to the false teachers, Bauckham elucidates:

They rejected the authority of the OT prophecy by denying its divine origin. They said that while it may be true that the prophets received signs and dreams and visions, their prophecies were their own human interpretations of these, not God-given interpretations. The OT prophecies were therefore just products of the human mind, like the apostolic message (v 16a). . .

In reply, the author denies this view, and reasserts, in the standard terms used by Hellenistic Jewish writers, the divine origin of OT prophecy. No prophecy in the OT Scriptures originated from initiative or imagination. The Holy Spirit of God inspired not only the prophets' dreams and visions, but also their interpretations of them, so that when they spoke the prophecies recorded in Scripture they were spokesmen for God himself.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Hiebert, *Second Peter*, 83.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 235.

Therefore, a study of II Peter 1:20-21 within its immediate context shows that Peter highlights the divine and human cooperation in the origin or production of the prophecy of scripture. Furthermore, although the author is addressing the origin of the prophecy of scripture primarily, the same principle can be argued for the origin of scripture in general, especially in light of the New Testament authors' view of the nature of scripture.¹¹⁴ In light of the origin of the Scriptures, Knight is correct when he advances that Bible authors equated their writings with the very words of God because God was the ultimate source of their works. In this case, the same would be true of the origin of all prophecy of scripture.

In view of this analysis, we may conclude that this passage highlights the fact that the Holy Spirit was very active in the process of committing scripture to paper.¹¹⁵ Indeed, "Scripture was not initiated by man, the result of human research. Scripture is of divine origin."¹¹⁶ Commenting on the nature of inspiration in light of II Peter 1:20-21, Pinnock rightly concludes:

Holy Scripture was written by men in the style, vocabulary and modes of their day. The Spirit controlled the human writers but did not obliterate them. Each had a message to deliver. Yet, in the very mentioning of the human side of Scripture, the apostle makes it abundantly clear that the initiative lay with

¹¹⁴ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 447.

¹¹⁵ Edward Curtis Professor of New Testament at Prairie Graduate School, Three Hills, Alberta, interview by author, 10 August, 1997, Langley, British Columbia.

¹¹⁶ Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 57.

God, and the literary product was divinely authored. Their work has a divine stamp upon it. For they were moved by the Spirit, and their word was endowed with singular power and truthfulness.¹¹⁷

The author of this text does not seem to have concerned himself to any extent with the specifics of God's working alongside the human authors in this creative literary work, but he does show us what was done, the end product. Therefore, II Peter 1:20-21 becomes a significant passage in developing a better understanding of the doctrine of inspiration.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have analysed Barr's interpretive conclusions about II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21. We find a common pattern in his exegesis. There are at least two exegetical tendencies Barr reflects in his treatment of these two passages. In both cases his interpretive conclusions are not well supported by the biblical data. Consequently, he adopts interpretive approaches that seem to have lesser exegetical support. Why, then, does he adopt such interpretive conclusions? We see that his reasons appear to be less exegetical than polemical. In his attempt to clarify and redefine the doctrine of biblical inspiration, he ultimately confuses the key exegetical issues. As a result, he fails to wrestle adequately and convincingly with the key exegetical issues of the text under consideration. As a consequence, he can be seen to have chosen these exegetical decisions with a view to bolstering his

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

preferred theological views. He appears to be so heavily bent on attacking the fundamentalist views on the texts that his overall approach is seriously distorted by this theological bias.

Therefore, from the grammatical and linguistic characteristics of the key texts we have analysed, we hereby conclude that Barr's exegesis and conclusions about these two passages, namely, II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:19-20, are unlikely. Hence, we affirm that the traditional view of interpreting these two passages in favour of the 'origin of scripture' has superior textual support for a more convincing view of the meaning of biblical inspiration than what Barr advocates.

The purpose of the next chapter is to evaluate critically Barr's view of biblical inspiration or the origin of Scripture as summarized by his four propositions about inspiration, namely, (1) Inspiration is not a central doctrine in the Bible; (2) Inspiration applies to the community of faith; (3) Inspiration includes the contemporary effects; and (4) Inspiration means Scripture is inspiring.

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.¹

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

¹ 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 3:16-17.² Furthermore, he concludes that Paul's epistle to Timothy is "a late and marginal document" in the Bible.³

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.⁴ The New Testament

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

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

⁴ 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.⁵

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.⁶

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.

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

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

⁶ 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,"⁷ 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)⁸ 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,

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

⁸ 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."⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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

⁹ See Hübner, "' D" NZ,"in *Exegetical Dictionary*, 261.

¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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

¹¹ 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.¹²

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.¹³ 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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).¹⁴ 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."¹⁵ We must be thankful to Barr for the depth of insight he brings to this

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

¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷

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

¹⁶ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 125.

¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ Spong is correct when he says that the Bible “did not drop from heaven in a complete and final form, written in Elizabethan English.”¹⁹

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.²⁰

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

¹⁸ 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."

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

²⁰ 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.²¹ 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,

²¹ 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.²²

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."²³ In other

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

²³ 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.²⁴

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

²⁴ 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.²⁵

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.²⁶ Furthermore, orthodox theologians, however, have traditionally referred to this as "illumination" rather than inspiration.²⁷ 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.²⁸ No such claim is made for

²⁵ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 126.

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

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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."³⁰

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

³⁰ 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."³¹ 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"³² 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,³³ 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

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

³² 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.

³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵

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

³⁴ For further discussion see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 256-258.

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

eisegesis of the likes of Professor Canaan Banana³⁶ 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.

³⁶ 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,³⁷ a view he has adopted from William J. Abraham.³⁸ 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*,³⁹ 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

³⁷ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 128.

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

³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

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."⁴¹ 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

⁴⁰ Ibid., 128-129.

⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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

⁴² 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,⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ Indeed, the Greek term $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ does not mean *inspiring* at all. Scripture is inspiring, perhaps, because of its divine origin, but technically, in its biblical meaning $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ 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. $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ means much more than inspiring. We must realize that $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ 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 $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in II Timothy 3:16, Lea and Griffin are correct when they maintain that "Paul was not asserting that the Scriptures are inspiring in

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ 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."⁴⁵ Indeed, the key point in this text is that "the Scriptures owe their origin and distinctiveness to God himself."⁴⁶ 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

⁴⁵ Lea and Griffin, *2 Timothy*, 236.

⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

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."⁴⁸ 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

⁴⁷ Barr, *Scope*, 58.

⁴⁸ *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).⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ In addition, Barr argues that "the men of the Bible had no Bible:

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

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

there was no Bible in the biblical period."⁵¹ According to Barr, the Bible is more of a community's address to God than God's address to man.⁵² 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

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² 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."⁵³

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.⁵⁴ 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,"⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ We

⁵³ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁴ Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," 39.

⁵⁵ Carson, "Books on the Bible," 351.

⁵⁶ 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 errors⁵⁷ therefore, to impute inerrancy to the Bible would be a gross theological blunder.⁵⁸ While orthodox theologians have always differed as to just what the process really involved,⁵⁹ 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,"⁶⁰ that "any realistic approach to the subject must begin by accepting that the Bible

⁵⁷ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 124-125.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 124.

does contain some factual error,"⁶¹ and that God would inspire a Bible with errors in it so that he might communicate with mankind,⁶² 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"⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ However, there are conceptual difficulties embedded in this understanding of biblical inerrancy.⁶⁵ Other evangelical scholars have

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Barr, *Modern World*, 16.

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

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

⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶

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.⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸ 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.”⁶⁹ The article continues:

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

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

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

⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰

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.”⁷¹

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.⁷² At best, the evangelical emphasis on biblical inerrancy purports that “it is impossible to sustain the *sola scriptura* principle without infallibility.”⁷³ Commenting on the theological significance and implications of inerrancy Pinnock says that a

Airport.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 51.

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

⁷² See Feinberg, "Meaning of Inerrancy," 296-297.

⁷³ 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."⁷⁴

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,"⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶

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

⁷⁴ Ibid.

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

⁷⁶ See Feinberg, "Meaning of Inerrancy," 304.

⁷⁷ 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."⁷⁸

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.⁷⁹ (1) The epistemological argument: a single error in the Bible does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the entire Bible

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

⁷⁹ 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:⁸⁰ (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)

⁸⁰ 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).⁸¹

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.⁸²

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

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

⁸² *Ibid.*, 63-64.

uncertainties of interpretation; and the same is true of his hearers.⁸³

Therefore, when Barr concludes that “any account of inspiration must therefore begin by accepting that inspiration does not guarantee inerrancy,”⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ 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

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 125.

⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶

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,

⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷ 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

⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸ 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

⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹

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

⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰

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 the Bible 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,"⁹¹ thus the Bible

⁹⁰ Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 126.

⁹¹ Barr, *Modern World*, 17. Italics mine.

becomes the word of God for us "as and when the divine Spirit breathes through it."⁹² 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.⁹³ 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."⁹⁴ 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

⁹² Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 126.

⁹³ Barr, *Scope*, 62.

⁹⁴ 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.⁹⁵ 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."⁹⁶ 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

⁹⁵ 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.

⁹⁶ Barr, *Scope*, 56.

specifically but rather deriving from all the stages alike.⁹⁷

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.⁹⁸ 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."⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰ 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

⁹⁷ Ibid., 60.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁹⁹ 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."

¹⁰⁰ 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.

CHAPTER SIX

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE: ITS BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS -

A Response to Barr's View

In the preceding chapters we have established that Barr's preferred view of biblical inspiration reflects his presuppositions about the Bible, namely, its nature and authority. This view is closely linked to his emphasis on the Bible as a product of the community of faith. He asserts:

The striking thing about 2 Tim. 3:16 is not its declaration of scriptural inspiration but its unstressed and low-key application of it. It is not remarkable that it says nothing about inerrancy or historical accuracy, which were not an issue at the time or until many centuries later; but, more important, it says nothing about scripture being the foundation of the Christian faith, or the ultimate criterion of its genuineness, or the decisive factor above all others in the understanding of it. What it does say is that scripture is *useful, profitable*, for the needs of the pastoral ministry. The verse belongs to practical rather than to dogmatic theology.¹

Barr comments further:

¹ James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983, 20-21.

The Bible, then, is the product of tradition, editing, and revision on the part of the community. But this means that the argument traditionally considered to be ‘Catholic’, namely that the Bible derived from the church, is in many ways generally valid as against the position esteemed as ‘Protestant’, which was reluctant to see the Bible as deriving from the church and which therefore sought to give the scripture priority over the church in the order of revelation. The ‘Catholic’ argument has at least as much justification as the ‘Protestant’ one. This Protestant view was basically an anachronism: its account of scripture was predicated upon the completed Bible, and upon the distinction between scripture and tradition which was affected by the process of canonization; but it did not provide an account of scripture *as seen from within biblical times*, as seen from within the making of the Bible.²

Barr is even more precise in his explanations on the origin and nature of the Bible. He elucidates:

The Bible is in its origin a product of the believing community. Modern biblical study has made this much more plain to us than it could ever have been in the past. Traditional doctrines of scripture suggested to Christians over many centuries that the Bible was a message *from* God *to* the community. And of course we can still say this, but we can say it only more indirectly: in the sense, perhaps, that scripture grew out of the tradition of the believing community but, having so grown, became in its turn the Word of God to the community.³

Here, we see that according to Barr, the highest point of reference is the community of faith. This is the fundamental category shaping his thought. Consequently, the community is to determine the meaning of the

² Ibid., 28-29.

³ James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980, 113.

Bible. However, we must hasten to mention that Barr does attribute some kind of authority to the Bible, though he seems to deny that this authority is a resultant function of its inspiration.

The question of biblical authority and all the related observations, though a perennial issue, is still, in fact, the common stock of biblical and theological discussion in our present day. Hence, questions like ‘What in the Bible is God’s word and what is *only* man’s word? What is eternal, binding and valid, and what no longer concerns us, because it is bygone word of man? Where does the one begin and the other leave off? What must one believe, and what may one confidently give up as obsolete and archaic?’⁴ are still pertinent questions that require thoughtful answers. Professor Canaan Banana has also argued for a ‘new Bible,’ one that can be considered authoritative (not oppressive) by the Africans or other non-western peoples.⁵ Banana’s argument covers five major points, all related to the issue of biblical authority: (1) A need to liberate the Bible from culture-specific world views; (2) How the Bible has been and continues to be used as an oppressive instrument; (3) A short review of the origin and development of the Christian Bible; (4) What a de-mythologised, liberated Bible might mean for humanity today; and (5) Is Christ the product of the Bible or the Bible is the product of Christ?⁶ The central issue in Banana’s proposition is: Does the Christian church claim that its Bible, which

⁴ See Günther Bornkamm. *Early Christian Experience*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969, 3.

⁵ Isabel Mukonyora, James L. Cox, and Frans J. Verstraelen, ed. *“Re-Writing” the Bible: The Real Issues - Perspectives from within Biblical and Religious Studies in Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1993.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

originated in a particular time and context, possesses an exclusive and universally normative value for people living in quite different contexts and times with their own sacred traditions? This is an important and relevant question. Commenting on current issues with regard to biblical authority, Pinnock makes an important observation when he says, “The principal cause of modern theological sickness is a crisis of valid authority. . . . The central problem for theology is its own epistemological base.”⁷ Montgomery agrees with this analysis. He observes that “The doctrinal problem which, above all others, demands resolution in the modern church is that of the authority of Holy Scripture.”⁸ Barr also comments on the biblical authority issue:

In many traditions of Christianity the principle of the authority of scripture has been magnified as far as it can be done, but this runs into the ultimate difficulty that, when one enters into the Bible itself one finds that its own actual statements, taken as they stand, indicate a rather more relative and less absolute emphasis. The question then is, whether the phenomena of the biblical texts themselves are to be allowed to revise and remake our principles, or whether our principles are to be read into the biblical texts, even at the cost of obscuring their meaning.⁹

Thus we cannot overlook or react to those who make the Bible a mere datum of religious sociology, by attempting to deny that the Bible has a social milieu. We have to be willing and ready to discuss, evaluate, and analyse our theological presuppositions before we draw any logical

⁷ Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1997, 10-11.

⁸ John Warwick Montgomery, ed. *God's Inerrant Word*. Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974, 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

conclusions. Furthermore, we should not simply use our venerable theological traditions, be it evangelical or liberal, to shelter us from the radical truth of God's Word that may challenge our theological comfort zones in our day. In addition, as responsible students of God's Word, we cannot afford to deliberately twist or manipulate biblical evidence for personal gain, then that would be dishonest. However, we must hasten to mention at this juncture that the differences between the Euro-centric and Afro-centric approaches¹⁰ to doing theology become much more distinct and apparent when we evaluate theological presuppositions. Indeed, world-views influence our approach to interpreting God's Word. However, it is incumbent upon all of us to let the Scriptures set the agenda insofar as our interpretation of a given text is concerned.

We all have presuppositions. By presuppositions we mean the fundamental grid or framework through which people, theologians in this case, interpret or are engaged in biblical hermeneutics. Such an underlying grid is like an umpire or a referee at a hockey, basketball or soccer game. Sometimes referees may appear to be insignificant, and one may not even be aware of their presence during the course of the match. However, the fact of the matter is that it is the referee who monitors and influences, if not determines, the results of the soccer game. The referee calls the shots. Thus we see that down through the ages world-views serve not only as explanatory devices and guides to conduct, but also as

¹⁰ Barr does not employ the terms "Euro-centric" and "Afro-centric." However, he refers to different approaches to doing theology, namely, the *deductive* and the *inductive* [Ibid., 22]. Although speaking from a western or Euro-centric world-view, these two distinct approaches are tinted by one's presuppositions about the Bible. This fact will become more apparent as we proceed.

the foundation to re-enforce or alter the actions of those who embrace them.¹¹ Consequently, one thing is obvious though, it is imperative in western culture (Euro-centric world-view) to be critical, that is, to subject all our thinking, including biblical, to the criteria of either subjectivity or objectivity. The Afro-centric culture is also critical and perceptive, but is more open and willing to live with ambiguity. A belief system is not necessarily nullified by an inability to articulate some of its aspects. In Afro-centric theology, it is possible to strongly and comfortably believe in some aspect of God's revelation or the spiritual realm without pushing for well defined theological categories. In the western culture, crystallization of beliefs and theological positions is esteemed highly. The long and the short of this method, in our opinion, is that in the final analysis, the Gospel gets conformed to our ideology, rather than informing it authoritatively and correctively concerning God's overall purposes and design.

Some people object to any intrinsic authority of the Bible. There are several questions that need to be addressed as we consider this issue of biblical authority. Where and/or how did the Bible get its authority? Can we identify the Bible with God himself? Is authority a completely isolated and autonomous idea which can be attached to the Bible irrespective of the Bible's content? Is the authority of the Bible something intrinsic to the Bible itself? Where does the authority of the

¹¹ Thoughts from Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo, (AEAM - Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar, General Secretary), "*Towards an Understanding of African World-View and Values - Inter-cultural Relationships.*" Unpublished speech prepared for AIC Orientation Weekend, October 2-4, 1982 at Brackenhurst Conference Centre.

Bible reside? Responding to the question, ‘Has the Bible any Authority?’
Barr concludes:

Authority resides in the people of God, or perhaps more correctly in the central leadership of the people of God; but it also resides in the scripture which they formed and passed on to later generations as their own communication, as the voice which they wanted to be heard as their voice. The grounding of scripture is in the history of tradition within Israel and the earliest church.¹²

God has given us inquisitive minds, and it is alright to ask such hard questions. Moreover, the doctrine of inspiration, rightly understood, can provide us with some solutions to these issues. Furthermore, renowned Bible scholars like, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and James Barr,¹³ - to mention but a few, have argued that the Bible is essentially a human product on which evangelical pietism has imposed an authority.

The purpose of this chapter is to respond to Barr’s view of biblical authority and to establish a view of biblical authority by evaluating what the Bible says about itself. In a word, in our attempt to establish the authority of Scripture, we have to consider its source or origin and the purpose for which Scripture was given. We have pointed out that we all have presuppositions whenever we encounter data, and in this case, biblical data. Our premise is that the Bible, in its final canonical form, is God’s Word to human beings, and it must be the Christian’s final authority in matters of doctrine and practice. In other words, we do accept

¹² Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*, 64.

¹³ Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984, 139.

that the human perceptions, speculations, creativity, editing, *et cetera*, and all that contributed to and shaped the Bible in its definitive form, is according to God's direction. God, through his Holy Spirit, influenced, superintended, and guided the process (involving individuals and communities of faith) leading to the final text. Inspiration rests in the written authoritative text, not in the writers. It is this written normative text, the Holy Scripture, that is to be the judge.¹⁴ Thus we can assert that this "God-breathed out" book, the collection of books (the sixty-six books, recognized as the Protestant canon) are normative or authoritative for the Christian. Scripture, then, is to be perceived as the objective standard for measuring what we need to know concerning faith in God and how we ought to conduct ourselves as Christians, God's people. This premise is a point of departure from some nebulous or undefined view of the nature and authority of Holy Scripture, like the one advocated by Barr. Such a view of Scripture does not seem consistent with what Scripture tells us about itself. In a word, the view of Scripture Barr has embraced is eisegetically drawn. We do not apologize for spelling this out and taking such a stance. We do affirm the absolute importance of and commitment to an inspired written text, the Word of God, as the locus of God's special revelation to human beings. Does this special revelation, the Bible, itself, tell us its authority, its origin or why it was written? What is the foundation for biblical authority? In his

¹⁴ For a more detailed discussion on the text-centred interpretive approach to Scripture, see Walter Vogels, *Interpreting Scripture in the Third Millennium: Author, Reader, Text*. Ottawa: Novalis, Saint Paul University, 1993. Professor Vogels argues that the best interpretation of Scripture is one that looks for the world within the text because the text is the final judge.

comment on the issue of whether the Bible is God's word or merely man's word, Bornkamm lays a crucial foundation for proceeding in tackling this question. He advises:

And yet I think that under the influence of this "either-or" question of God's word or man's word in the Bible we entangle ourselves in hopeless uncertainties from which we no longer are able to emerge. To solve and answer these questions one must bring along as it were an already finished dogmatics, i.e. a doctrine about what in the Bible is valid as God's word and must remain intact, and what we may confidently view as the mere outdated word of man from an antiquated era. However, by such a procedure we circumvent the best that contact with the Scripture yields to us: the hearing, amazement and discovery of that about which we knew nothing. In other words, we miss a real and living encounter with God in his word. For how is such an encounter with God's word still to occur if, either from a rigid, orthodox dogmatics or from what reason accepts as valid, we already know from the start what is God's word and what is merely man's? So we ought to learn a thoroughly different approach. First and foremost we ought to direct our thoughts to what the New Testament itself has to say to our question and how it answers it.¹⁵

Thus the Bible itself becomes an important source and foundation for responding to our questions.

The Source of Scripture

In keeping with the main thrust of this thesis, that is, endeavouring to establish theological conclusions derived from textual (exegetical) analysis, II Timothy 3:16-17 is, indeed, a key passage in understanding

¹⁵ Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 4.

the origin of the Scriptures:

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All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the everyone who belong to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (*The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament 1990*)

How does Barr understand II Timothy 3:16-17 in relation to the biblical authority question? He certainly agrees that here, in II Tim. 3:16-17, “we have an assertion of the biblical inspiration,”¹⁶ but not without a qualification. He summarizes his position quite clearly when he says:

The striking thing about 2 Tim. 3:16 is not its declaration of scriptural inspiration but its unstressed and low-key application of it. It is not remarkable that it says nothing about inerrancy or historical accuracy, which were not an issue at the time or until many centuries later; but, more important, it says nothing about scripture being the foundation of the Christian faith, or the ultimate criterion of its genuineness, or the decisive factor above all others in the understanding of it.¹⁷

He comments further on the meaning of II Tim. 3:16 in another one of his books:

The famous text in which inspiration is mentioned, II Tim. 3.16, is from a fairly marginal source, and it makes no connection whatever between inspiration and historical accuracy, it leaves it quite vague which books were the ‘scriptures’ under

¹⁶ Barr, *Holy Scripture*, 1983, 20.

¹⁷ Ibid.

discussion, and above all it is notable for its low-key treatment of the matter: though it says that all scripture is inspired, it does not for a moment suggest that this is the foundation of Christian doctrine or practice, all it says is that scripture, being inspired, is ‘profitable’ for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.¹⁸

According to Barr, “the Bible is fully authoritative, but it does not have authority to question the accepted doctrinal tradition. This is analogous to the late medieval position against which the Reformers protested.”¹⁹

Earlier in chapter 4, we observed that the adjective *ἐκθεωρητός*, a biblical hapax legomenon, literally means ‘breathed-out by God.’ Hence, this text openly declares to us the divine origin of the Scriptures. The fact is simply and plainly stated, while the process itself is not dealt with. Pinnock’s words are worth noting at this juncture when he says:

It is probably best to think of inspiration as a divine activity accompanying the preparation and production of the Scriptures. We are not privileged to observe how in hidden and mysterious ways the Spirit worked alongside the human agents in the creative literary work, but we can plainly see what was done.²⁰

Thus Packer is correct when he comments on the process of inspiration:

Inspiration did not necessarily involve an abnormal state of mind on the writer’s part, such as a trance, or vision, or hearing a voice. Nor did it involve the obliteration or overriding of his personality. Scripture indicates that God in His

¹⁸ Barr, *Scope and Authority of the Bible*, 63.

¹⁹ Barr, *Holy Scripture*, 30.

²⁰ Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*. Cambridge: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984, 63.

providence was from the first preparing the human vehicles of inspiration for their predestined task, (cf. Je. i.5; Is. xlix. i, 5; Gal. i.15) and that He caused them in many cases, perhaps in most, to perform that task through the normal exercise of their abilities which He had given them. . . . Moreover, it appears that biblical books may have passed through several editions and recensions over the centuries before reaching their final form, as the book of Proverbs certainly did. (cf. Pr. x. i, xxiv. 23, xxv. 1.)²¹

Indeed, II Timothy 3:16-17 makes a profound statement about the origin of Scripture, that is, the whole of Scripture is "God-breathed," literally, "breathed-out by God." ²² In II Tim. 3:16 Paul declares that "All Scripture is inspired by God." In this designation, that is, "in calling Scripture 'inspired,' Paul gives it the highest claim to authority. It is specifically 'Scripture' that Paul points to as the locus of God's revelation."²³ Consequently, it is this divine origin of Scripture that ensures its usefulness (v.17). Thus we appeal to Scripture because we see and accept Scripture as ultimately God's Word, written not only for our information but also for our transformation. Erickson highlights the significance of the Scriptures according to II Tim. 3:16-17. He explains:

The impression here is that they are divinely produced, just as God breathed the breath of life into man (Gen 2:7). They therefore carry value for building up the believer into maturity, so that the man of God may be "complete, equipped for

²¹ Packer, James I. *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God - Some Evangelical Principles*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958, 78.

²² Benjamin B. Warfield. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948, 245.

²³ John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, 42.

every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17).²⁴

Paul's mention of (D' NZ,²⁵Black, 1963, 202. "writing," in II Tim. 3:16 refers to the Old Testament which he has previously mentioned in verse 15, "and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." However, (D' NZ cannot be limited to the OT only because all Holy Scriptures, including Christian writings, came to be given an equal authority.²⁶Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, 492. In the New Testament, the word (D' NZ (50x) is used only of holy Scripture,²⁷ God's authoritative revelation to mankind. This technical term was used as a designation of Holy Scripture. Thus, II Tim. 3:16 highlights the significant source or origin of this Holy Scripture, that is, God, (God-breathed out). Assuming Pauline authorship of II Timothy, some key points need to be noted here in recognition of the authority of the Scriptures. Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ. In the NT, the use of the word '*apostle*' carried the idea of being "sent on a definite mission, in which he acts with full authority on

²⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, p. 202.

²⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*. London: Adam & Charles

²⁶ Colin Brown, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*.

²⁷ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, 163. "Scripture" is exclusively used in the NT with a sacred meaning of Holy Scripture: (1) the individual Scripture passage and / or (2) Scripture as a whole; all the parts of Scripture.

behalf of the sender and is accountable to him."²⁸ Apostleship has elements of commission, that is, having authority of and responsibility of the sender. Paul, like all the other apostles of Jesus Christ, was primarily preoccupied with the notion of communicating clearly God's Word to people. We must admit that under God's influence and guidance, they succeeded in the execution of their task. In the NT we find that the opening verses of most books state the author's relationship to Jesus Christ. Thus we find phrases like, "... a prisoner of Christ Jesus," (Philemon 1), "... an apostle of Jesus Christ," (I Pet. 1:1), "... a servant of God," (Titus 1:1); *et cetera*. In the book of Acts, especially chapters 9 and 13, observe Paul's recognition of his apostolic work by the other apostles and teachers of the Gospel. Paul also recognized his apostleship (Acts 26:16 "I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you," Jesus Christ had said to him); I Cor. 2:13 "This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words;" and in I Thess. 5:27 Paul also writes, "I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers." He recognized that what he taught was coming straight from the Lord Jesus Christ, I Thess. 2:13 "... the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe." (see also I Cor. 14:37). In addition, there is also the point made in II Pet. 3:15-16 that Paul's writings were considered to be Scripture even by a fellow apostle, Peter:

²⁸ Elwell. *Dictionary of Theology*, 71.

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their destruction.

Therefore, since II Timothy is a writing of Paul, and since he was an apostle (one given authority to teach and write on behalf of Christ), it has the direct authority of Christ. II Tim. 3:16-17 is declaring that Scripture, in its entirety (“*All Scripture*”), is God-breathed. In a word, God, in a very personal way controlled and guided the human authors of Scripture in such a way that they wrote exactly what God intended them to write. We also see in the Scriptures how the Holy Spirit was working in and through these human authors in such ways that their personalities, literary creativity, *et cetera*, were not suppressed or overtaken but rather became channels of this divine revelation. Perhaps, this explains, to some degree, the different genres contained in Scripture, allowing for such a diversity of personalities of biblical authors to sparkle throughout Scripture. God was (and is) revealing himself to people through each of these Bible authors and characters. Furthermore, we also find that there are some words and phrases unique only to some writers. Thus, our study of II Tim. 3:16-17 reveals that this text becomes an important passage as well as an authoritative source about the origin and resultant nature of Holy Scripture in its entirety. This seems to have been the view taken also by the early Church and key evangelical scholars. Commenting on the use of the phrase, ‘the Word of God,’ as it applied to the Bible, Packer

concludes:

The phrase declares the divine origin of that to which it applies: whatever is denominated 'the word of God' is thereby affirmed to be a divine utterance. It is for this reason that the phrase is applied to the Bible. The purpose of this usage is to make explicit the biblical conception of Scripture—which is that Scripture is the sum total of divine revelation recorded in a God-breathed written form, and that every scriptural statement is therefore to be received as a divine utterance.²⁹

Furthermore, texts like Romans 3:1-2, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God," show that New Testament writers perceived the Scriptures as the Word of God, the written 'oracles of God,' (NIV). Silva makes a significant observation and contribution to this topic when he comments on theological importance of II Tim. 3:16 when saying, "As if to anticipate the modern objection to inscripturated revelation, Paul in II Timothy 3:16 explicitly identifies the *written* word (graph') with God's very breath (*theopneustos*, "God-breathed").³⁰ Hence we see that the emphasis on the written text, breathed-out by God, reveals God's desire and plan to ensure the permanence of his word among fallen human beings.

Therefore, a closer look at II Tim. 3:16-17 shows that two things are declared and affirmed in this passage: (1) Scripture's divine origins, that is, "**all Scripture is God-breathed out**" and (2) "**all Scripture is**

²⁹ Packer, "Fundamentalism," 85-86.

³⁰ Moisés Silva, *God, Language and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990, 37.

useful" for godliness. Therefore, the Scriptures are always relevant and authoritative because they are in their entirety God's Word to mankind. One other crucial point to observe in II Tim. 3:16-17 is that the emphasis is on the *inspiration of Scripture not the writers*.

We can confidently conclude that II Tim. 3:16-17 "teaches that the entire Bible ((D" NZ) came from God in order to show us how to live."³¹

Another key passage that also highlights the divine origin of the Scriptures is II Peter 1:20-21:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. [NIV]

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In this text, the apostle Peter is building on to his transfiguration experience (verses 16-18), highlighting the impact this event made upon him and the other apostles (James and John) who were present on that day. There is no doubt that Peter makes reference to this extra-ordinary experience in attempt to highlight at least three points: (1) to re-enforce his authority as an apostle, (2) to show the existing relationship between the Old Testament and the apostolic message (which was being twisted by false teachers), and (3) to point to the future coming of Jesus Christ,

³¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986, 69.

which the false teachers objected to. However, in verse 19, Peter has clearly moved from a personal eyewitness testimony to the Scriptures, the Old Testament in this case. See how he says, “6" Â\$P@u, < \$, \$" 4 J, D@< JÎ < BD@NOJ46Î < 8` (@<, ‘And we have the prophetic word made more sure, . . .’” This indicates a very crucial link between prophets of Old and the apostolic witness. The critical term here is \$, \$" 4 J, D@<,³² which means ‘reliable, dependable, certain.’ It becomes clear that Peter’s focus is on the reliability of the Holy Scriptures, the Old Testament. Peter seems to be saying, ‘If you do not believe me, turn to the Holy Scriptures.’ We find this approach to the Scriptures throughout the New Testament. One of the most powerful arguments for the truth of Christianity throughout the New Testament was the argument from prophecy. Speeches we find in Acts 2, Romans 15, I Peter 2, the whole book of Hebrews, and Revelation, place tremendous emphasis on what is written in the Scriptures. The biblical writers sought absolute assurance, just like their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, for whom the phrase “it is written,” sufficed to clinch a theological argument.

In II Peter chapter 1 verse 20, Peter is basically continuing his previous point on the reliability of the Scriptures.³³ “Above all,” literally, “knowing this first,”³⁴ establishes a foundation for what is to follow. The interpretive or exegetical issue in this text (verse 20) lies in the meaning

³² Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, 138.

³³ Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981, 275.

³⁴ Ibid.

of ἡ ἀποκάλυψις, ἡ ἀποκάλυψις (interpretation; explanation), a biblical hapax legomenon (as a noun). However, the most probable, sound interpretation of this crucial term should lead us to the conclusion that, “. . . no prophecy of Scripture is to be interpreted by an individual in an arbitrary way. This fits the problem of the false teachers’ distorting Paul’s writings and other Scriptures mentioned at 3:16, and the next verse (v.21) clarifies that the prophecy originated with the Holy Spirit.”³⁵

Hillyer’s commentary on the theological significance of II Peter 1:20-21 is worthy noting:

When Peter’s readers obey his behest and study the OT, they must keep clearly in mind as they do so that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. The words they read are not what a prophet has thought up for himself. True prophecy never came about as a result of some individual’s personal ideas: it never had its origin in the will of man. The impulse came from the Holy Spirit of God. When the OT prophets spoke, they were not passing on some understanding or view of their own. They were revealing a message from the Spirit: they spoke from God. It was for this reason that their words must be closely heeded.

It follows, therefore, that readers of the Scriptures must look to the same divine Spirit to inspire their understanding of the text (Ps. 119:18). It is the Spirit who must interpret and apply his own message in his own way.³⁶

Indeed, the human authors of Scripture had the Holy Spirit of God as their impulse for writing Scripture. Their messages revealed the very thought

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Norman Hillyer, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Peter, Jude*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992, 180.

or intent God wanted his people to hear, "they spoke from God." In other words, the human authors of Scripture did not convey their own understanding or view of what God wanted them to communicate through the written word.

II Peter 1:20-21 makes two important points: (1) The Holy Spirit guided the human writers along as they delivered God's truth; and (2) The Scriptures are not a result of human will. Commenting on II Pet. 1:20-21 Warfield says that this text, first, denies that Scripture owes its origin to human initiative. Second, this text asserts that Scripture's source lies in God.³⁷

Having considered what the Scriptures say about their own origin, it is important to note that the resultant nature of Scripture stems from the character of God.

As we have established from these explicit references to the origin of the Bible that God is the source of Scripture, it is appropriate that we consider briefly some of the permanent qualities of God. Most evangelical systematic theology texts discuss God's greatness, spirituality (Jn. 4:24), personality (Exod. 3:14), eternity (Acts 17:24-25), constancy (Ps. 102); God's goodness - moral purity (Is. 6:1-4), integrity (2 Tim. 2:13), love (I Jn. 4:8); God's immanence (Jer. 23:24), transcendence (Is. 55:8-9); the trinity of God (Gen. 1:1); and so on.³⁸ These characteristics of God affirm at least two truths about God: his incomprehensibility (Job

³⁷ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948, 136.

³⁸ For further explanation of these characteristics of God see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 263-342.

11:7, Is. 40:18) and his knowability (Jn. 14:7, I Jn. 5:20).³⁹ Other Scripture passages such as I Sam. 15:29, Titus 1:2, Heb. 6:18, Jn. 17:17, 19, Num. 23:19, - to mention but a few, affirm that God cannot lie. Deceitfulness or lying is inconsistent with the very nature of God. Thus, whatever God says is always true and trustworthy. In a word, the veracity of God guarantees to us the truth of everything he discloses to us. Hence, the Word of God, the Bible, has both an inherent and bestowed authority because it is God's Word to mankind. The authority of the Bible is not imposed by its human authors or biblical scholars. The Bible is intrinsically authoritative because it is God's Word; it embodies God's truth to human beings. The Bible points beyond itself to God. It has conferred authority.

Therefore, the Bible should be viewed and accepted as our authority in matters of doctrine and conduct for it tells us about the Supreme God and what he requires of mankind. Carl Henry is correct when he concludes:

It is the Bible that is God's authoritative Word. Whoever would speak of God as authoritative over human life, yet clouds the authority of the Bible, in effect obscures an authoritative God. Critics who compromise the authority of Scripture almost invariably correlate the authority of God with speculative notions of God's Word and its implications for man's answerability to God and duty to his fellow-men. The church is not determinative of Scripture, but Scripture is authoritative over the church; whatever authority the church has, she has solely on the basis of the revelational prerogative of God.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 25.

⁴⁰ Carl F.H. Henry, "The Authority and Inspiration of the Bible" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* ed., Frank E. Gaebelin, Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981, 12.

Such an understanding of the Bible is witnessed and/or expressed by the Old Testament prophets, Jesus' understanding of the Scriptures, and the New Testament writers.

The Old Testament Prophet(s)

Vangemeren says of the *n-bî*, prophet:

The prophets opened windows to the grand plan of God by which the eye of hope may have a vision of what God has prepared for his people. The prophets spoke in time as they were human beings empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak God's word in space and time. . . . The Lord empowered the prophets by the Spirit to proclaim and write down the revelation he gave them as a witness for future generations.⁴¹

The Old Testament prophets knew that their authority lay beyond themselves, outside of themselves, that is, in God. Time and time again, these prophets employed phrases to enable their audiences to take note of their divine authority. Jeremiah is a good example here, (1:4) "The word of the LORD came to me saying," (1:7) "But the LORD said to me," (1:9) "Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now, I have put my words in your mouth,'" (1:11) "The word of the LORD came to me," (1:12) "The LORD said to me," (1:13) "The word of the LORD came to me again," (1:14) "The LORD said to me," (2:1) "The

⁴¹ Willem A. Vangemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*. Grand Rapids: Academy Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1990, 18-19.

word of the LORD came to me,” *et cetera*.

The main idea conveyed in the word *n~bî*, prophet, is “that of authorized spokesman.”⁴² There are three Pentateuchal loci for understanding *n~bî* (prophet): (a) Exodus 6:28-30 - where we read of Moses refusing to be God’s spokesman to the children of Israel, and then Aaron was to speak in Moses’ place to Pharaoh. Thus Aaron was the *n~bî*; (b) The second locus is in Numbers 12:1-15 - where Miriam and Aaron presumed to take the place of Moses as the mediator of God’s divine revelation to the Israelites. The LORD God himself intervened, came down in a pillar of cloud, and declared that Moses only was able to hold a direct communication with God. As for the other prophets, God would communicate with them via dreams and visions. In Jeremiah 23 we learn that a true *n~bî* was someone who spoke on God’s behalf only if the LORD God had given him/her a message to speak to people; and lastly (c) In Deuteronomy 18, before Moses died, God announced that the office of *n~bî* would continue. In the light of the false prophets in the land of Canaan, God wanted his messengers, the prophets, to speak and/or write with similar authority that Moses had exercised. Actually, God commanded the people to render the *n~bî* following Moses’ departure, the same obedience. According to Psalm 74:9, Matthew 12:38, and Acts 2:22, five certifying signs of a *n~bî* are indicated: (1) the *n~bî* must be Israelite; (2) speaks in Jehovah’s name; (3) supernatural knowledge of the near future was to be a sign of the authenticity of divine appointment; (4)

⁴² R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, ed. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, 544.

the *n-bî* might perform some other miraculous sign; and (5) strict conformity to (absolute agreement with) the previously certified revelations of God by Moses and other future prophets (Deut. 13:1-18). This final requirement was so important that Deut. 13 is devoted to it.⁴³ These servants of God were aware that there is certainty in the Scriptures, God's revelation. F.F. Bruce makes an important note when he comments:

When we speak of 'the scriptures' we mean 'the sacred writings' as distinct from other writings: to us 'scripture' and 'writing' are separate words with distinct meanings. But in Hebrew and Greek one and the same word does duty for both 'writing' and 'scripture': in these languages 'the scriptures' are simply 'the writings'—that is to say, 'the writings' *par excellence*.⁴⁴

This is evidenced by their authoritative proclamation "Thus says the Lord," which could be understood as a reference to the authoritative Word of God as well as an appeal to inspiration, the origin of their proclamation⁴⁵. This phrase "Thus says the Lord" appears over and over again in prophetic literature to highlight the authority of the prophets' messages based on the source of their oracles, that is God. What God communicated was regarded as truth and therefore, authoritative. The

⁴³ Ibid., 544-545.

⁴⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988, 29.

⁴⁵ God's spokespersons, (the biblical prophets and biblical writers), appear to have spoken on God's behalf and uttered Scripture in a way tantamount to quoting God himself. Thus making their words authoritative because they knew that God was the source of their utterances and/or writings. For further explanation, see Brown, *Dictionary of NT Theology*, p. 400.

Law (*Torah*) contained the laws which the people of God were under obligation to obey. For example, Moses wrote “all the words of the LORD” in the “Book of the Covenant,” Exodus 21-23; 24:4-7. Samuel spoke words about the manner of the kingdom and “wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the LORD,” Samuel 10:25. Hence, these Sacred Writings “were received as abidingly valid ‘oracles of God,’ to be treasured, studied, believed and obeyed.”⁴⁶ Another important text is Hebrews 1:1-2 which “clearly declares that the entire OT is a deposit of written oracles of the *n^ebî’îm*. The word “prophets” is extremely important in this text, for, “In the LXX *n-bî*’ is always translated *prophets*; (TDNT, VI, p. 812).⁴⁷ It was these prophets who spoke on behalf of God, that is, God made his declarations through his servants (see Num. 3:16, 51; Josh. 19:50; 22:9; II Sam. 22:31; Prov. 30:5; Isa. 5:24).

One other key observation to note here is that both the oral and written traditions of Scripture (sacred writings) were regarded as authoritative before the establishment of the canon. The narrative of Exodus 24:4-8 shows this:

Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the Lord has said: we will obey.”

⁴⁶ Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, 54.

⁴⁷ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, Vol. 2, 545.

Initially, OT or classical prophecy was mainly orally expressed. The written prophetic literature forms came up later. However, the goal of this process was to establish an authoritative foundation, the Holy Scripture.

Here we agree with Childs' analysis:

In the transmission process, tradition, which once arose in a particular milieu and addressed various historical situations, was shaped in such a way as to serve as a normative expression of God's will to later generations of Israel who had not shared in those original historical events. In sum, prophetic oracles which were directed to one generation were fashioned into Sacred Scripture by a canonical process to be used by another generation.⁴⁸

Therefore, we can confidently conclude that the canonization of the Scriptures did not impose authority on the Bible. It seems the canonization process simply recognized what had already been accepted in practice as the authoritative Word of God. A second observation to note is that the appeal to the authority of Scripture by the prophets was never doubted or questioned. In fact, disobedience and law-breaking brought about judgment or disaster.⁴⁹ A third observation is that there seems to be no separation between what Scripture and God says. What God says, Scripture says, and vice versa. This is a crucial observation in that references to Holy Scripture by the community of faith often carried the notion that this was indeed God speaking. Again, we must hasten to

⁴⁸ Brevard S. Childs. "The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature." Interpretation 32 (1978), 47.

⁴⁹ For some selected examples, see Leviticus 24; Deuteronomy 28; and II Kings 12:13.

mention that we must not personify the Word of God. The Word of God is basically God's revelation, and we should not equate it with God himself. We must realize that the Bible does not share in the same qualities that God possesses. As God's revelation, the Bible discloses God and his will to human beings. It is not a static or abstract concept, but rather living, dynamic, and spiritual. The fact that Scripture came from God, conferred this inherent authority. Furthermore, the statement 'the Bible is the Word of God' evokes the notion of authority.

Jesus' Understanding of the Scriptures (the Old Testament)

The word 'testament' means 'covenant,' pointing to the agreement made between human beings or between the Almighty God and human beings.⁵⁰ Wiersbe says, "As far as the Bible is concerned, the Old Testament is the record of the old covenant, the covenant God made with the Jews at Mt. Sinai; and the New Testament is the record of the new covenant that Christ made through His blood."⁵¹

What is the Old Testament? What does the phrase "Old Testament" mean? What is actually embedded in this phraseology? Sailhamer explains:

An important assumption lying at the heart of the use of the name *Old Testament* is the notion of a New Testament. To speak of an *Old Testament* is to confess the existence and legitimacy of the *New Testament*. Otherwise, what would be the sense of calling the

⁵⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe. *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*. Colorado Springs: Victor Books/SP Publication, 1993, 11.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Testament *Old*? It is *Old* in relation to the New.⁵²

Sailhamer expounds on the significance of the Old Testament:

The Testament (Covenant) bears witness to the fact that among all the religions of the world, the Old Testament claims to witness to a unique relationship between God and man. To speak of an Old Testament theology is to mark it off from the theologies and the religious texts that abound in the setting of the ancient Near East.⁵³

This also suggests the protracted historical dealings in love, mercy and faithfulness of God who alone establishes the covenant. Commenting on the Old Testament theology as an attempt to understand divine revelation, Sailhamer offers this explanation:

Old Testament theology is concerned with that revelation of God's will in the OT. It expects to find in its study of the OT that which comes from God. To speak of the OT as revelation is not to speak in the past tense. If God has spoken in the text of Scripture, then there is no reason to limit that Word to the past. If he has spoken, it does not matter when he spoke. If God has spoken, his voice is still to be heard today. The OT, then, is the revelation of God's will; and a theology of the OT must seek to be a presentation, or statement, of God's will. In other words, the task of OT theology implied in the definition given above is a normative one. It has taken up the idea of revelation. It seeks to say, "Thus says the Lord."⁵⁴

It is with such an understanding that Kaiser, in his book, *Toward an Old*

⁵² John Sailhamer. *Introduction to Old Testament Theology - A Canonical Approach*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

Testament Theology, agrees that OT biblical theology “is the presumption that an inner unity which can bind the various OT themes, concepts, and books will be found.”⁵⁵

Consequently, Jesus Christ, as the ultimate fulfilment of God's revelation ("In the beginning God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe," Hebrew 1:1-2) endorsed authority of the Scriptures with great emphasis. He appealed to the authority of the Scriptures in his teaching, not to human authority. The following few examples indicate his understanding of and attitude to the Scriptures as recorded in the gospels: ". . . whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said to me, so I speak," (Jn. 7:16, 12:49ff); He declared to his hearers that their eternal destiny was subject to hearing and keeping his word (Mt. 7:24ff); He taught "as one having authority," (Mk. 1:22, Mt. 7:29); and "It is written (*It stands written*)," (Mt. 4:1-10); "You have heard;" "It has been said;" "I have not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it," (Mt. 5:17-48). These passages give evidence to the absolute authority of the Scriptures, to which Jesus Christ directed his audience now and again. In fact, it is quite apparent in the Gospels that one word seems to encapsulate Jesus' teaching and preaching methodology, that is, authority. Matt. 7:28-29 shows that the crowds were amazed at

⁵⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Toward an Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978, 20. He sees a single plan or development running through the Bible. The OT concept of *promise, blessing, seed*, etc are identical to the NT *epangelia*. (Italics mine)

Jesus' teaching, "for he was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." Jesus Christ, the ultimate fulfilment of God's revelation confirmed without reservation that the Scriptures are authoritative. Jesus treated all his arguments from Scripture (Jn. 10:35; Mk. 12:24 "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?").

Jesus Christ did not only endorse the authority of Scripture but he humbly submitted himself to the authority of Scripture. The account of Jesus' temptation recorded in Matt. 4:1-11 and Lk. 4:1-13, shows Jesus' commitment to obey what was written. It is crystal clear that his response to the tempter was based solely on the authority of Scripture, "It is written," literally, "It stands written." These words from the Scriptures are cited as words with eternal validity. Jesus "regarded the words of the text as an authoritative answer to the insinuations of the devil."⁵⁶ He also kept the Law, although his critics who did not understand that he had come to fulfil the Scriptures accused him of breaking the Law. Guthrie makes an important point when he comments:

On several occasions Jesus was engaged in controversy with the religious leaders, but in no instance does he detract from the authority of the OT. On the contrary, he criticized the Pharisees for leaving undone the weightier matters of the law (Mt. 23:23), although they were meticulous over the observance of its lesser demands.⁵⁷

In Matthew 15 we are exposed to Jesus' sharp attack against the Pharisees

⁵⁶ Donald Guthrie. *New Testament Theology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981, 958.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

and scribes who had made God's word powerless and had substituted their human tradition for it, "So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines,'" (vv6-9). Furthermore, although Jesus' whole life and ministry was an embodiment of freedom and transcendence of the Law, he also characterized submission to authority of the Scriptures. Packer rightly observes Jesus' life:

His whole ministry, as recorded in the Gospels, may justly be described as a prolonged and many-sided affirmation of the authority of the Old Testament. For He drew His conception of the Messianic office entirely from the strands of Old Testament prophecy concerning the One that should come--the Son of David who was the Son of God, the Son of man who should take the kingdom, the Servant who should preach mercy and suffer for the people's sins. He told the congregation at Nazareth that He was preaching in fulfilment of Scripture.⁵⁸

This explains the frequency of the statement ". . . the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled / . . . the Scriptures must be fulfilled," (Matt. 26:56, Mk. 14:49).

It appears Jesus Christ's understanding of biblical authority highlights at least two significant points. First, the Scriptures (the Old Testament) must be received as authoritative because they originate from God. What the Scriptures say, God says. We cannot accept one without the other. However, we must be careful here not to attempt to equate

⁵⁸ Packer, "*Fundamentalism*," 56-7.

Scripture with God. Second, Jesus' words or teaching was given in accordance with the previous revelation of God, that is, the Old Testament. Perhaps this explains why some biblical scholars today assert that we cannot understand the New Testament without the Old Testament, and vice versa. The Scriptures were written so that mankind (more specifically, the people of God) would learn them, understand them, believe them and live by them. Therefore, we can conclude that the Scriptures are our authority in matters of what to believe about God and how believers should conduct themselves as God's witnesses.

The New Testament Writers' Understanding of Scripture

To anyone who reads the New Testament, it does not take long to realize that, here, the Word of God, that is, what God has spoken to people directly and through the human authors has been meshed to establish an authoritative document. It becomes immediately clear to anyone who reads this document that the New Testament writers claimed God to be the source of their writing. In other words, there is no doubt that these writers knew fully well that they were communicating God's authoritative and reliable Word. This seems to have been their understanding of the Scriptures right from the outset. For example, the apostles preached the gospel of Jesus Christ based on the authority of the risen Christ according to the Scriptures (OT). Actually, the apostles argued from the Scriptures, citing, both directly and indirectly, words from Scripture as the words of God. These early followers of Jesus Christ battled against the corruption of God's revelation through human

ordinance and tradition, Colossians 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.” However, in the final analysis the New Testament writers appealed to the authority of Holy Scripture. Three selected examples will suffice the point here:

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:
'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? (Acts 4:25)

The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, . . . For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'
(Rom. 1:2, 9:17)

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' (Gal. 3:8)

The New Testament is replete with citations and/or quotations from the Old Testament. Jesus followers recognized the abiding authority of the Scriptures in their proclamation of God's revelation. In fact, Scripture is treated as God-given law for the people to live by. It seems, submission to Scripture's teachings was regarded as authoritative. Actually, the Old Testament was the early church's text for it contained the acknowledged divine teachings. Edwin Blum explains:

To the apostles, the Old Testament Scripture was clearly their supreme authority! It is an absolute, not a relative, authority. They do not attempt to correct it, nor do they seek to put one Old Testament book or saying against another. They assume that the book speaks with a unified voice. They plainly recognize that the books were written by human authors, but even more explicitly they maintain the God speaks in through these writings (Acts 4:25; 28:25; Rom. 9:27, 29).⁵⁹

The apostle Paul is a key New Testament writer who also witnesses to the authority of the Scriptures. There are numerous indications of Paul's convictions in all his epistles. Paul communicated God's truth authoritatively. In Col. 4:16, he instructs the Church at Colossae to read his letter to the other churches, "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea." Furthermore, he declares that the truth he communicated through his letters was to be obeyed, "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed," (II Thess. 3:14). The apostle Peter warns his readers against false teachers who misunderstand the Scriptures. He also regarded Paul's writings to be Scripture:

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. *His letters* contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they *do the other Scriptures*, to their own destruction. (II Pet. 3:15-16) [italics is mine]

⁵⁹ Edwin A. Blum, "The Apostles' view of Scripture" in *Inerrancy*, 41.

Here, Paul's writings are actually equated to Old Testament teachings or instructions as indicated by the underlined words. The warning to be on the look out for teachers who through their erroneous understanding of the Scriptures undermines the authority of Scripture applies also to us today.

Commitment to the authority of Scripture can never be emphasized enough in our day and age where God's truth is being regarded with the same relativism that permeates our society. It is expedient that the authority of the Scriptures be affirmed if God's absolute truth is to be proclaimed in all nations.

One of the most recent and promising developments for Protestant and biblically oriented theologies is the great work being done on narrative theology. For a long time, the world of biblical studies has been preoccupied with the *Sitz-Im-Leben*, with its focus on the 'form,' the formal structural components, that is, vocabulary, grammar, and idioms, and life situations.⁶⁰ Indeed, there has been a lot of research conducted on the notion of discovering the world which gave birth to the Bible, but neglecting the world within the text itself. As Vogels observes, the text-centred focus on the world within the text is really the key to proper hermeneutics:

A text is a world of its own. Some texts may even become independent of the prevailing historical, social, economic and political conditions. Their value and meaning transcend these changing factors and seem to have a kind of 'eternal'

⁶⁰ Hermann Gunkel was one of the first to propose that the prophetic forms be studied separately as literary phenomena in an essay "Nahum 1," *ZWA* 13 (1893): 223-44; idem, "The Prophets as Writers and Poets," in *Prophecy in Israel: Search for an Identity*, ed. David L. Petersen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 22-73.

value. The limited, restricted, finite world of the author is replaced by the unlimited, unrestricted, infinite world of the text. This certainly applies to the Bible, which is not limited to one culture.⁶¹

On the other hand, the narrative theology attempts to bring the reader to the *Sitz-Im-Text*, thus making the written text a reality in itself. The virtue of the *Sitz-Im-Text* approach to biblical theology is that it really sees that the Bible itself is a story, a kind of literature with a logic (actually even logics) of its own. Kaiser and Silva are right when they conclude, “That text, as it were, has a life of its own.”⁶² It is absolutely important for us to understand that the meaning and truth of God’s Word (the written text) is not in that it conforms to standards of rationality and intelligibility which are drawn from outside it, but that it invites us to be taken up into its patterns, expressions, and grasp of reality. We have to do the best we can to enter into the world of the text if we are to hear the voice of God as recorded in his revelation, the Holy Scripture. It is this text, the inspired text, that we believe has timeless truth. Anyone in a totally different culture and period in time can discover God’s eternal truth as he/she interacts with the Holy Scripture.

The next section attempts to make a palatable connection between the concept of the authority of Scripture and the Christian life. How does the authority of Scripture affect the life of a believer? Are there practical implications for this connection? Or, is there any connection at all

⁶¹ Vogels, *Scripture in the Third Millennium*, 77-78.

⁶² Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, 238.

between the two concepts?

Some Implications of the Authority of Scripture Today

It is crucial that we begin from the biblical foundation we have established in this study. As we have seen, a proper understanding of the doctrine of biblical inspiration should lead us to a high view of Scripture. We have considered various Scripture passages and have discussed what seems to have been the view of Jesus Christ and the New Testament writers' understanding of the authority of Holy Scripture. Again, II Timothy 3:16-17 provides such a profound statement about the concept and significance of a high view of Holy Scripture:

B F" (D" N→ 2, ` B<, LFJ@H6" Âé NX84μ@HBDĪ H* 4" F6" 8\ " <, BDĪ HĪ 8, (μ ` <, BDĪ HĪ B" < D2TF4<, BDĪ HB" 4*, \ " < J→< Ĩ < * 46" 4@Fb<®, Ē<" -DJ4@HĪ ÒJ@Ø 2, @Ø-<2DT B@Ī BDĪ HB < \$D(@< • (" 2Ī < Ĩ >ODJ4FμX<@H

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Brown's comment on the essence and applicability of II Timothy 3:16-17 is worth noting. He says, "Scripture teaches us the right path, - it rebukes us when we go off the right path, - it corrects us as to how to get back on the right path, and - it trains us to stay on the right path."⁶³ This agrees

⁶³ Professor Mike Brown, "Theology Readings on Scripture," Directed Study Course, Trinity Western Seminary, Langley, British Columbia, Spring 1995.

with what the psalmist expresses to the LORD God in Psalm 119:105-106, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn and I rise to it, to keep your righteous judgments,” (*The Interlinear Bible - Hebrew and English, Hendrickson, 1976*).

In this chapter, we have established that Scripture is ‘God-breathed out.’ It is a divine revelation from God, not a human speculation about God. Scripture is, indeed, God's Word to human beings. Therefore, biblical authority becomes a crucial doctrine for us today because it is from the Bible that we derive all the theological truths that we need in order to lead lives that honour God in the world. We live in a society that is characterized by relativism. Truth has become a rather relative concept. Hence, we find that the concept of absolute truth is shunned, if not ridiculed. Truth has been individualized - *what is truth to you may not be truth for me!* Such an approach to life fails to acknowledge that human beings are sinful and that they have a propensity to rebel against God's standards for life (Rom. 3:23-24) *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."* Human beings need a higher criterion for measuring truth about what they need to know about God, the human condition, redemption, eschatology, *et cetera*, that is beyond themselves. The Bible is, then, that reliable standard of truth which God has given to human beings so that they can know how to relate to God and live according to his revelation. God's Word, the Bible, must be accepted as the final authority in matters of doctrine and conduct. In other words, in every culture in the world where people have accepted the gospel of

Jesus Christ as the Saviour (Christianity), Scripture should be the standard for measuring what they need to know and believe about God as well as how they ought to live.

The origin and nature of Scripture, that is, it came from God, requires that human beings ought to subject themselves to God's revelation (truth). Scripture has inherent authority because it is God-breathed out. In a word, a proper approach to the subject of biblical authority must begin with God himself since all truth has its beginning in him.

Therefore, since God is the supreme authority, he is his own authority. Thus, God's disclosure of himself becomes our authority if we are to know who he is and what he requires of us. In actual fact, God's revelation, the Bible, declares his authority to human beings, his creation.

Such a high view of Scripture has pragmatic implications for the theologian, the clergy, lay person, and the church at large. As an Afro-centric theologian, a Zimbabwean-Canadian, to be more specific, my examples in this section will reflect this cultural context. Christianity is growing rapidly in Zimbabwe.⁶⁴ However, although the church is growing rapidly in Zimbabwe, theologically, it is still very poor. Dialogue on the relationship between the Zimbabwean animistic cultural milieu and the Christian faith continues as the church attempts to relate to its local environment. In addition, ancestral worship, the concept of death and after-life, polygamy (especially among the older generation), reliance on

⁶⁴ Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993, 598. Current statistics show that Zimbabwe is 61.7% Christian while traditional religions are at 32%.

charms, superstition, witchcraft, - to mention but a few issues, are still affecting the life of the church significantly. It goes without saying that Christianity does not exist in a vacuum, but is always expressed culturally. Judith Bahemuka, in “The Hidden Christ in African Traditional Religion,” makes an important point when she discusses inculturation:

Christianity in Africa was brought to a people deeply rooted in their culture. They had their own understanding of God; they had their forms of worship, their rituals, symbols, cleansing and reconciliation ceremonies, and they had their own worldview. They perceived their situation vis-a-vis their environment in their own way. God, in His wisdom, revealed Himself to the African in his own situation. In other words, Christianity did not find a vacuum in Africa. It came to a rich culture, and this culture was to receive the Word of God, and either become richer because of the Gospel message or give way to the same.⁶⁵

For an example, when a black Zimbabwean turns to faith in Christ he/she becomes a black Zimbabwean Christian. God neither expects nor requires that this black Zimbabwean Christian must abandon his/her Zimbabwean culture and adopt another culture. We cannot agree more with an Afro-centric theologian, a Cameroonian to be specific, who observes that ‘the Churches of Africa suffer from genuine underdevelopment’ and are weighed down by the ‘cultural burden’ of western Christianity.⁶⁶ This is all part of current efforts and commitment to constructing an African

⁶⁵ In J.N.K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa, ed. *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*. Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1989. 13-14.

⁶⁶ Jean-Marc Ela. *African Cry*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985, 107.

theology that is truly African yet still remaining true to the biblical text.⁶⁷ Thus the command of Jesus Christ, “Therefore, having gone, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all things whatsoever I commanded you,” (Matt. 28:19-20, *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament 1990*) must be taken seriously once a person turns to faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour. The discipleship process takes shape within one’s cultural context.

In brief, the believer’s understanding of Jesus Christ (Christianity) is always culturally expressed. One’s cultural world-view provides that theoretical framework for rationalizing events and life experiences.

Côté beautifully defines culture:

A complex whole (which includes the arts, the customs and habits of a people, their fundamental values, and functional myths) which gives a society or particular group its distinct identity and uniquely characteristic way of thinking, perceiving, behaving, judging, and valuing.⁶⁸

Culture, as that acquired knowledge which enables a people group to analyse and interpret data so that they can make meaning out of life experiences, is a very complex reality. When a person gets converted to Christianity, his/her cultural world-view influences how he/she will

⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion on the inseparable connection between the Christian faith and the African culture, see Dr. Tite Tienou’s book *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa: Theological Perspectives in Africa*. Nairobi: Africa Christian Press, 1990.

⁶⁸ Professor Richard Côté, Class Lecture “Faith, Religion & Culture,” Fall Semester 1996, Mission Studies - St. Paul University, Ottawa.

express or flesh out the Christian faith within his/her milieu. However, God in his grace, brings all ethnic groups to the realization of their unity in Christ as they deliberately seek to obey the Scriptures.

In the light of the significance of the authority of the Scriptures, the criterion for determining what we need to know about God and how we ought to conduct our lives as believers becomes God's Word. The Bible, as God's absolute and reliable standard for truth must have the prerogative to purge, to leaven, and to permeate my culture (as a Zimbabwean Christian). Anything that is inconsistent with godliness or biblical teaching must be discarded in honour of God's revelation. Besides, every culture, as a human contrivance, has both good and bad practices in it. There is no culture that has become totally Christian. Therefore, it is wrong to talk of a *Christian culture* or *Christian nation*. That is a misnomer. Actually, the truth of the matter is that Christianity is foreign to every culture because it originated with God who cannot be confined to cultural restrictions. Thus Christian believers in different cultures have to attempt to embrace and express the Christian faith from within their cultural standpoint.

True theology should always have a practical link with the day to day life of those who take God's Word seriously as Christians do their best to formulate a sound doctrine, obey the Scriptures, and live godly lives as Zimbabwean Christians. The authority of God's Word becomes our absolute and most reliable standard for measuring what to believe about God, how to relate to God, and how to behave the Christian faith. Failure to acknowledge and submit to biblical authority results in self

made speculations and standards which replace God's rightful position in human life. We would be left with relative truth where there would be no objective measurement for truth. All truth is relative to God, and this is in harmony with what the apostle Paul says, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ," II Cor. 10:5. Actually, Bible teachers would have no authority to teach or preach authoritatively if there is no acknowledgment of or submission to biblical authority. Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me," (John 14:6). Thus the cultural understanding of divine redemption through ancestral worship and all that goes with it, would be an acceptable practice in the Zimbabwean church if there is no biblical criteria for measuring what God requires of us. Furthermore, according to Professor Canaan Banana, the whole notion of "rewriting the Bible" would also be an option because the Bible as we have it today would not be deemed relevant and authoritative. Adherence to biblical authority implies that God's Word must be studied diligently, applied, and obeyed faithfully. The Bible is God's Word. The Bible is always relevant, "*All Scripture is God-breathed . . . and is useful for . . .*" (II Tim. 3:16). The key point we are advocating here is that the Bible is culturally sensitive and that Christianity is culturally expressed. There are descriptive as well as prescriptive truths (teachings) in Scripture. Consequently, a good student of the Bible must faithfully study the biblical text (exegetically, not eisegetically) employing a proper hermeneutical approach that is true to the text before applying Scriptural

truth in a given cultural milieu.

Therefore, the principle of biblical authority has far-reaching pragmatic implications on the life of the believer today. It certainly calls Christians to submit themselves to God's divine revelation, the Bible. Such a high view of the Scriptures has practical implications on how we ought to approach, study and employ God's Word in our personal lives as well as in the Church life (*Christ's Church for that matter, Matt. 16:18 - Jesus said, ". . . I will build my church,"*). It is appropriate to conclude:

Jesus read "all the Scriptures" of the OT as a prophetic outline of what he came to accomplish; and he took its very language to be the natural, and at the same time the supernatural, expression of his Father's will. By his attitude to and use of OT Christ truly validated its divinity. With the same conviction of its divine authority the NT writers accepted it and quoted it; and in its light they themselves, as divinely authoritative.⁶⁹

Consequently, we see that the Bible's authority is really founded upon its own internal claims. It surely "stands written" as the Word of the living God, "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul and spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart," Hebrews 4:12. Here are a few selected texts from the Bible which highlight the authority or the uniqueness of God and his Word:

"He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on

⁶⁹ Elwell, *Dictionary of Theology*, 140.

bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord,”
(*Deuteronomy 8:3*).

“As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless,” (*II Sam.22:31*)
cf. *Psalms 30:5*.

“Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in
Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God,” (*II Cor. 2:17*)
cf. *II Cor. 4:2*.

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says,”
(*James 1:22*).

“Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a
hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (*Jeremiah 23:29*).

Psalm 119, the longest psalm in the Psalter, is another beautifully crafted
key portion of Scripture on the significance of the Word of God to the
believer. With its twenty-two stanzas of eight verses each,⁷⁰ the alphabetic
acrostic manner (in the Hebrew text) displays the theme of the law of
God. The author employs eight different words for God’s word: (1) *tôr-h*,
occurs twenty-five times; (2) *d-b-r*, appears twenty-four times; (3)
mišp-šm, occurs twenty-three times; (4) *‘dš*, occurs twenty-three times;
(5) *mišw-h*, occurs twenty-two times; (6) *juqqîm* occurs twenty-one
times; (7) *piqqûdîm*, occurs twenty-one times; and (8) *.mr-h*, occurs

⁷⁰ Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 5*. Grand
Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991, 737.

nineteen times.⁷¹ Hence, Matthew Henry beautifully summarizes the content of Psalm 119 as follows:

(1) God's law, because they are enacted by him as our Sovereign. (2) His way, because they are the rule both of his providence and of our obedience. (3) His testimonies, because they are solemnly declared to the world. (4) His commandments, because given with authority, and lodged with us as a trust. (5) His precepts, because prescribed to us. (6) His word, or saying, because it is the declaration of his mind, and Christ, the essential eternal Word, is all in all in it. (7) His judgments, because by them we must both judge and be judged. (8) His righteousness, because it is all holy, just, and good, and the rule and standard of righteousness. (9) His statutes, because they are fixed, and of perpetual obligation. (10) His truth, or faithfulness, because the principles on which the divine law is built are eternal truths.⁷²

Indeed, biblical authority has a significant role in the community of faith (the church) and in the life of the individual believer. Church doctrines, formulated from within Holy Scripture, should form the foundation for what the Christians believe as well as be the measurement for how Christians ought to conduct their lives as God's ambassadors, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, . . . (II Cor. 5:20).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have established the importance of biblical

⁷¹ Ibid., 737-738.

⁷² Matthew Henry, *The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, In One Volume*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, 734.

authority by observing the origin of Scripture (the Bible), the Old Testament prophets' understanding of the Scriptures, Jesus' understanding of the Scriptures, and the New Testament writers' view of the Scriptures. We have also observed a selected number of biblical passages that support biblical authority. The resultant nature of the Scriptures, that they are God-breathed, and that they have always been received authoritatively by Old Testament prophets, Jesus Christ, the apostles, the New Testament writers, and the New Testament (early) Church, places them as God's revelation to human beings, wholly reliable, and trustworthy regarding its facts. Thus, the Bible is our divine authority in all things pertaining to what to believe about God, how to approach God (or how to be reconciled to God) and how Christians should conduct their lives within a given culture.

God's Word (the Bible) must be our absolute standard for measuring what we must believe about God, how to approach God, and how we ought to live (behave) as God's people. Biblical authority has practical implications for us as Christians. Psalm 119:105, referring to the Scriptures says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Those who have embraced God's authoritative truth have an awesome responsibility to dedicate their lives to assimilating this truth. Waliggo expresses similar concerns when he writes on Christianity and inculturation in the African context:

The permanence of Christianity will stand or fall on the question whether it has become truly African: Whether Africans have made Christian ideas part of their own thinking, whether Africans feel that the Christian vision of life fulfills their

own needs, whether the Christian worldview has become part of truly African aspirations.⁷³

Biko shares the same sentiments when he says, “Where people are subjected to a religion that is far removed from their cultural make up, then elements of disgruntlement begin to be noted and sometimes open defiance is soon displayed.”⁷⁴ Such an approach and sensitivity to one’s cultural milieu in contemporary theology calls for a higher view of Scripture as God’s authoritative word. ‘*Jesus in African Christianity*’⁷⁵ is, in my view, one of the best attempts to explore various aspects of contemporary theological issues pertinent to the African context. These African scholars advocate that theology is not Christian at all when it does not offer Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the answer to the human quest within a cultural environment, and as the answer to people who ask the reason for the hope that all Christians hold through faith. We must add that this faith is intelligent faith, that is, it is informed by God’s Word, the Bible. Although these reflections are culturally based, the foundation is God’s authoritative word, the Bible. Actually, this is the preoccupation of inculturation.⁷⁶ In this approach to theology, there is a deliberate effort to

⁷³ M. John Waliggo, ed. *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*. Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1986, 12.

⁷⁴ Stephen Mpilo Biko, *I Write What I Like*. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1986, 55.

⁷⁵ Mugambi and Magesa, ed. *African Christianity*, 1989.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 15. There are two approaches to inculturation. First, the attempt to construct a relevant theology by starting from the Scriptures. In other words, what the Bible teaches influences the entire process as well as the end result. Second, the approach that starts from the cultural context and strives to find relevant themes in the Bible.

incarnate the Christian message in a given culture by employing perspectives of that cultural worldview. Here, we are advocating that this process be established upon a solid foundation, that is, the Scriptures. The final aim is to have a theology that is biblical and offers Jesus Christ as that cornerstone, the Saviour.

God speaks to all people in their different cultural environments through His Word. He does not say one thing to one cultural or ethnic group and turns around to say quite a different thing to the other. If ever there is one additional principle to learn about God, it is his consistency.

The content of God's Word is like food—all peoples of the earth are to eat the same food (one menu for all) but it is prepared differently in all the different cultures. That is, the application of God's Word takes various forms among various people groups (ethnic groups), but all of them are to measure their beliefs and practices according to the Bible. Thus the Bible becomes both a measurement and a cleansing agent by virtue of its divine origin. Here, we are again re-iterating the significance of the text in its definitive form, to be the final judge. Nevertheless, we are aware that every reading, including every reading of the Word of God, always has a subjective element in it. However, in arguing for the text we are admitting that the reader gives meaning to the text, but also that the text itself, the biblical text, is the final authority of whether to embrace or reject certain interpretations and applications of the Bible.

We can comfortably place the Bible in such a position because "Scripture is the sum total of divine revelation recorded in a God-breathed written form, and that every scriptural statement is therefore to be

received as a divine utterance.”⁷⁷ Again, it seems scripturally logical to conclude that a proper understanding of biblical inspiration leads to a high view of the authority of the Bible, including its practical implications.

The next chapter answers the question, ‘How then should we think of biblical inspiration’ in the light of recent exegetical and theological developments? What can we learn from Professor Barr’s view of biblical inspiration?

⁷⁷ Packer, “*Fundamentalism*,” 85-86.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOW THEN SHOULD WE THINK OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION?

In the preceding chapters we have attempted to reconstruct and analyse James Barr's view of biblical inspiration in the light of recent exegetical and theological developments. The goal for this thesis, right from the outset, has been not to simply measure Barr against a stereotype, conservative, evangelical orthodoxy, but rather deliberately let him challenge that orthodoxy. We concede that the biblical and theological reflections of the kind Barr characteristically offers invite us to re-examine (and sometimes adjust) our positions even though we may not ultimately embrace all his propositions. W.A. Strange in his review of Barr's *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (1983) is absolutely correct when he comments on Barr's invaluable contribution to theology:

Two great strengths of Prof. Barr's writing are the depth of insight he brings to bear on the problems he discusses, and the ability he has to draw the reader to see familiar matters in a new light. In consequence, the reader will find something stimulating on almost every page, provoking new thought about the Bible, the way it came to be, and its function in the church. In spite of the denial that there is any 'programme' in this book, a reader who has not yet encountered Prof. Barr's thought could do no better than to begin here. Even where he does not agree with the author, he can only benefit from pondering the important issues which Prof.

Barr here places before us.¹

Though this statement touches directly on only one of Barr's books, it is true of all of his other works. Barr has a way of putting a genuine reader into a self-criticism mode. Every exegete and student of the Bible needs to approach the Holy Scriptures in a manner that does justice to God's divine revelation. For this to take place, certain factors must be put into consideration. Biblical interpretation, as an art, demands a thorough assessment. Such an assessment is not 'an inspired' process as was the process that led to the production of the Bible. Difficult as it may be for us to accept it, theology and all its related disciplines (hermeneutics, exegesis, homiletics, exposition, et cetera), have a subjective human factor, a personal experience that is affected to greater or lesser extent, by personal opinion. Our ongoing struggle as we attempt to establish a proper methodology and be good students of the Holy Scriptures is to minimize subjectivity.

Newbigin highlights the significance of a proper methodology in biblical studies. He reasons:

Unfortunately it is very difficult to be aware of the models which one is using for the grasping and organizing of evidence. In fact it is impossible to be aware of them while in the act of using them—just as one cannot see the lenses of the spectacles through which one is surveying the landscape. To do this one

¹ W. A. Strange, *Book Reviews*. Anvil Vol. 1, No. 1, 1984, 71-72.

must forget the landscape for a moment, take off the glasses, and look at them instead of through them. This exercise of critically examining our own cultural presuppositions in turn requires some experience of some other possible ways of grasping experience in order to gain a point of view for critical scrutiny.²

The disciplines of biblical hermeneutics and theology have a way of reminding us of our limitations as students of the Bible. We can never claim to know things in the Bible exhaustively. The more we discover God's truth as recorded in His Word, the more we discover there is more to discover. Indeed, the Bible has bottomless truth. A few Bible texts come to mind here: (1) I John 4:1 "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; . . ." Here, John is warning the community of faith, the Christians, to be on the lookout for false teaching. The threat of false teachers is not only from outside the community of faith but also from within the community. Hence the need to discern was critical. Even those who teach and preach from God's inspired word under the influence of the Spirit of God have to be examined in accordance with the Word, the Holy Scriptures. (2) Matthew 22:29 "Jesus replied, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.'" Jesus' response to the Sadducees shows that ignorance of the Scripture can lead to wrong interpretation and application of God's word. (3) Luke 24:45 "Then he opened their minds

² Lesslie Newbigin, "Text and Context: The Bible in the Church," Theological

so they could understand the Scriptures.” Here Luke highlights the fact that Jesus helps his followers (disciples) to grasp the meaning of the written Word ((, (D" μμX<" , *what has been written*). (4) Acts 17:11 “These Jews were more noble-minded than the ones in Thessalonica who received the word with all readiness, daily examining the Scriptures to see whether these things were so.” Luke characterizes the Berean believers as , Û(, <XFJ, D@4 *more noble-minded*. These believers tested the truth of the apostle Paul’s teaching by referring to the Scriptures, “rather than judging it by political or cultural considerations.”³ Another point we observe in these believers is that they were examining the Scriptures daily to check what Paul was teaching was really true to God’s revelation. (5) II Corinthians 2:17 “For we are not peddlers of God’s word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.” (6) I Corinthians 2:14 “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” Here, Paul is referring to the unsaved person who is not being guided by God’s Spirit in discerning biblical truth. There is a sense in which those who are born again by the Spirit of God, ‘the children of God’ (John 3:3; 1:12) are in a better position to understand the Scriptures than those who are not born again. Obviously, this has nothing to do with one’s level of spiritual maturity as a born again believer.

In addition, there are other Scripture passages that also enlighten us

Review 5, Number 1, 5-13, 1982.

³ Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9 (John-Acts). Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981, 471.

to the realities and awesomeness of interpreting Holy Scripture as we attempt to formulate a biblically sound doctrine: Hebrews 5:13-14 “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” II Peter 3:15-16 “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do other Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

As evangelical Christians, we are convinced that the Bible is an authoritative document. Our understanding of such an authority of the Bible is not something that we developed recently but rather something derived from what the Bible says about its origin, that is, *it is* ‘God-breathed.’ We believe that the Bible is our final authority in matters of doctrine (what to believe about God and how to approach Him) and practice (how we should conduct ourselves). Thus we agree with the statement that the Bible “as a divine product possesses absolute authority over the minds and hearts of believers.”⁴ Indeed, the Bible offers us knowledge of God and His will for us as human beings created in His image. Consequently, our theology must be founded upon Scripture if it is to be sound and credible. The point we are emphasizing here is that we

⁴ Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982, 7.

ought to establish a doctrine by searching the whole counsel of God's Word rather than topical investigations that usually suppress the author's intent. One of the major problems with topical investigations is that the Bible can be used as a proof text. Topical investigation is one of the products of the Euro-centric approach to theology (vis-à-vis the Afro-centric approach) where sometimes there is an undue emphasis or a preoccupation with packaging things neatly independent of the whole. Rather than listen to the voice of God as recorded in the Scriptures, we pretend to be searching for God's opinion on a given topic while satisfying our curiosity. The evangelical high view of Scripture leads us to believe that the Bible is a unified narrative. This is one reason we deliberately avoided trying to establish our critique of Professor Barr's view of biblical inspiration primarily on the two passages of Scripture, namely, II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:19-20, he uses in his argument for his preferred view of biblical inspiration. We have endeavoured to establish a view of the doctrine of inspiration that tries to encompass the whole counsel of God, that is, looking at both the OT and NT passages as we try to understand what the Scriptures say about their nature and how they came into being.

We have pointed out that although the word 'God-breathed' is a hapax legomenon, it is poor exegesis to argue for or conclude that the doctrine of biblical inspiration is a marginal one. Thus we have attempted to find out from within the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testament, what they say about themselves. We have already established this truth from our analysis of various Scripture texts in this

study. Indeed, we concur that the Bible has bottomless truth. Any student of God's Word knows that the more we delve into the world of the text, the more he/she discovers there is still more to discover.

The following conclusions about biblical inspiration have been formulated from a textual analysis of what we have found from within the Scriptures. We believe this is a crucial starting point because the centrality of God's Word, in the true sense, prevents subtle nuances and the whole concept of making theological conclusions out of our private ideas of the Bible. We must hasten to mention that some of these conclusions challenge (d) or contrast our conventional presuppositions about biblical inspiration. What then should we think of biblical inspiration? Given some of the findings from recent theological and exegetical studies, is there a better or healthier way of understanding biblical inspiration? Assuming that these recent studies contribute to a better understanding of biblical inspiration, how best can we explicate biblical inspiration?

1. Biblical Inspiration Highlights that the Bible is Co-authored:

We must answer important questions concerning biblical inspiration. For instance: (1) Is inspiration an hypostatic property or attribute of God which can then be communicated to things, texts, or people? (2) Is inspiration a relationship, a claim about how one thing (Scripture) is related to another thing (God)? Is inspiration a metaphor, or analogy, taking a more well known occurrence, like breathing and its relationship to speaking, and relating this ratio to another one, the way in which God is

thought to be involved in the writing of Scripture?

From our analysis and reconstruction of Barr's understanding of biblical inspiration in this study, we have identified that the fundamental category shaping his thought is that of the community of belief. Barr's highest point of reference in theology is the community of faith. In other words, according to Barr, the community of faith generates, out of its own processes, the Bible as an end result. It is this community of faith that determines the meaning of the Bible. Barr concludes:

The Bible takes its origin from within the life of believing communities; it is interpreted within the continuing life of these communities; the standard of its religious interpretation is the structure of faith which these communities maintain; and it has the task of providing a challenge, a force for innovation and a source of purification, to the life of these communities.⁵

Barr explains further:

Traditional doctrines of scripture suggested to Christians over many centuries that the Bible was a message *from* God *to* the community. And of course we can still say this, but we can say it only more indirectly: in the sense, perhaps, that scripture grew out of the tradition of the believing community but, having so grown, became in its turn the Word of God to the community.⁶

These two selected quotations, among others, give us insight into the deficiency of Barr's view of biblical inspiration.

⁵ James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980, 111.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

However, although Barr correctly places tremendous emphasis on the anthropological element in the formation of origin the Scriptures, he also acknowledges, though indirectly, the divine origin when he says, “And more important, *scripture was not created by a totally special act of God through a very small number of inspired writers*: it came to be through the crystallization of the tradition of the people of God.”⁷

Our study of II Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work,” (and other Bible texts like II Peter 1:21 “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”) has led us to the understanding of the human and divine collaboration in the inspiration process. God and human beings produced the Bible. A healthy conception of biblical inspiration does not imply that there is a choice between divine and/or human where the origin of the Bible is concerned. Thus we hereby assert that the Bible is God-breathed, ‘inspired by God,’ that is, and within the same breath we also acknowledge that God guided the human authors through the Holy Spirit to record their experiences (employing their literary skills, personalities, perceptions, speculations, cultural values, *et cetera*) so that the final outcome was exactly what God wanted to be recorded in the Scriptures. In other words, the human authors gave shape to the text (the Bible) under the direction or influence of God’s Spirit. The Scriptures in their final form (both the Old and the New Testament)

⁷ Ibid., 114. Italics is mine.

stand written as the Word of God to human beings. Schneiders echoes the same viewpoint when she highlights the uniqueness of the Bible (the Scriptures) as a sacred book. She comments:

The predication of revelation to scripture is a faith affirmation that the contents of the Bible are, or in some sense are related to, divine communication. Strictly speaking, the relation of the text to revelation is the ground and content of the affirmation that the scriptures are the word of God, that is, what God has 'to say' to humanity.⁸

We can comfortably conclude that biblical inspiration displays God's grace by involving the community of faith to take part in the writing of the Scriptures. According to II Peter 1:20-21 "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation . . . but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Thus God and the human beings (individuals and/or communities of faith) interacted in the inspiration process. Indeed, God took the initiative in this process. Pinnock is correct when he concludes:

It is probably best to think of inspiration as a divine activity accompanying the preparation and production of the Scriptures. We are not privileged to observe how in hidden and mysterious ways the Spirit worked alongside the human agents in the creative literary work, but we can plainly see what was done.⁹

⁸ Sandra Marie Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture - Information or Transformation*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991, 44.

⁹ Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984, 63.

This inspiration process, occurring over long periods of time, involved different individuals and communities of faith under God's guidance. The end result, we are asserting, was the production of a normative text, that is, the believers' final authority in matters of doctrine and practice. The Bible becomes the believers' constitution (criteria) for knowing who God is, what God expects of His creation, how human beings ought to approach God, et cetera, since this unique book is ultimately His revelation to human beings.

II Peter 1:20-21 addresses the issue of the origin of prophecy not the resultant writings of the Scriptures. However, prophecy in the biblical context is part of God's method of communicating his oracles or will to mankind. Prophecy has been an integral part of God's revelation. In an attempt to be true to the text, II Peter 1:20-21 highlights the co-authorship of the Scriptures, the Bible. Human beings were "carried along by the Holy Spirit" as they communicated God's Word to the people. The presence of the human factor is so real in the process of biblical inspiration.

Inspiration must not be viewed as a commodity, stuff or substance, and cannot therefore be hypostatized, thought to have a being independent of every other being. We propose that inspiration be viewed as a kind of relationship, in so far as where it is said to occur, there two or more things are comprehended by its working or its power, but it is not merely outside of the things it relates. Inspiration does change what it touches, even if only so long as it touches it. There is a relational involvement, but inadequate. The value of this metaphorical approach, apart from its

theological orthodoxy (for God does not in fact breathe, as God possesses no body and respiratory system), is that it enables the notion of inspiration to have a wider application.

The dual authorship of the Scriptures helps us to see that “the human authors of the various 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.”¹⁰ Luke, the apostle, shows us this anthropological reality as he interacted with selected accounts and documents already extant:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4)

Thus, “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.”¹¹ Ultimately, the Bible, as a collection of human insights and values, is really God’s normative and definitive document. This type of understanding biblical inspiration makes the Bible in its definitive form, always relevant, and something that is our

¹⁰ Brennan R. Hill, Paul Knitter, and William Madges, *Faith, Religion, and Theology: - Approaches to Scripture and Tradition - A Contemporary Introduction*. Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990, 279.

standard for measuring divine truth. Vogels seems to argue for this approach to Scripture in his “Interpreting Scripture in the Third Millennium.”¹²

Thus any conception of biblical inspiration that posits a dichotomy between the anthropological and divine involvement is deficient because it does not recognize the theological implications of the union of God and human beings in the production of the Bible. A better understanding of the process of biblical inspiration calls to embrace the reality that God, in his economy, employed various people within the communities of faith, to write the Scriptures. At the same time, we must acknowledge that God is really the final author of Holy Scripture. In other words, God superintended the writing process so that the Bible stands written specifically and exactly according to what He had in mind. We cannot deny that the Bible has a social milieu. Indeed, every text has a context within the community of faith. Perhaps, we can still accept the thought that the Bible is man’s word and God’s word¹³ provided we rise to the level of acknowledging that the Bible is ultimately God’s Word. When we rise to this level of theological understanding we recognize that the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Walter Vogels, *Interpreting Scripture in the Third Millennium: Author-Reader-Text*. Ottawa: Novalis, Saint Paul University, 1993. In this book Vogels shows that the Bible, should be the final judge when doing theology.

¹³ Hill, Knitter, and Madges say that “the Bible contains not only God’s word, but also human words,” p. 279. This view of the Bible implies a hierarchy of authority within Scripture. Basically, it encourages the reader to make a distinction between God’s word and man’s word. This is not a healthy way of approaching Holy Scripture according to II Tim. 3:16-17 because it undermines the ultimate origin of Holy Scripture.

Bible has a unique function and position as it “stands written” in its final shape, its canonical composition. This view of Holy Scripture sees Scripture as the normative, authoritative Word of God. By virtue of the origin of Holy Scripture, that is, God-breathed, it is logical to conclude that it is normative insofar as who God is, how to approach God, and how we ought to conduct ourselves in this world. In other words, God’s greatness, his personality, spirituality, infinity, purity, immanence, transcendence, sovereignty, the sinful condition of human beings and their need for a redeemer, *et cetera*, has been clearly revealed in the Scriptures so that we can know what he requires of us. The Scriptures reveal God to mankind and point mankind to God.

The Christian faith stands out as a divine revelation from God and not as a human speculation about God. Christianity affirms that God has revealed himself to human beings. This God is knowable. Thus, we see that the authority of Scripture is derived from its origin, God. Scripture, as the Word of God, becomes a central element in understanding biblical inspiration. After all, inspiration really boils down to the claim that God having originated the Word, he spoke it via human authors, and that this Word bears the veracity and constancy in accordance with what He wanted written in it.

Thus, a healthy theological understanding of the doctrine of biblical inspiration should espouse the notion of the co-authorship of the Bible. The human experiences recorded in the Bible reflect human literary skills, depicting a human theoretical or cultural framework from which they were able to rationalize, analyse, and interpret those

experiences and make meaning out of them under the influence of the Spirit of God. We admit and deliberately acknowledge that the human stories or experiences recorded in the Bible reflect a specific, limited cultural perspective of its human agents, and yet not restricted to that one particular culture. The Sovereign God chose to speak to all peoples of the earth from one specific culture, Jewish culture. There is no other doctrine of the Bible that can help us to see the union of the divine and the human features than the doctrine of inspiration. Packer comments:

Inspiration did not necessarily involve an abnormal state of mind on the writer's part, such as a trance, or vision, or hearing a voice. Nor did it involve any obliteration or overriding of his personality. Scripture indicates that God in His providence was from the first preparing the human vehicles of inspiration for their predestined task, and that He caused them in many cases, perhaps in most, to perform that task through the normal exercise of the abilities which He had given them. We may not suppose that they always knew they were writing canonical Scripture, even when they consciously wrote with divine authority.¹⁴

Furthermore, according to our analysis of II Timothy 3:16-17 and other Scripture texts, we must ultimately appeal to the Bible as God's Word because God is the author, "all Scripture is God-breathed..." This view sums up the 'evangelical' understanding of Scripture established upon the authority of Scripture. Bloesch is correct when he says, "Evangelical theology appeals to the authority of Scripture because it sees Scripture as

¹⁴ James I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983.

the written Word of God.”¹⁵ The final shape of Scripture, as it stands written in its canonical structure, is, indeed, the Word of God.

It is from such a high view of the Scriptures that the ‘evangelical’ camp appeals to the authority of Scripture with the understanding that God speaks the same message to all people groups in the world. God, in His sovereignty, chose to disclose His revelation first to the Jews but is not restricted to Jews. In other words, the whole Bible is *for us* but *not to us*. There is a sense in which authority of Scripture can be understood as a completely isolated and autonomous notion attached to Scripture because it is God-breathed.

Furthermore, the co-authorship of Scripture is also tied to three significant terms used in the evangelical understanding of inspiration, *verbal*, *plenary*, and *confluent*. Biblical inspiration is *verbal* in that the actual words of the canonical text, although created or crafted by various writers, are the product of the Holy Spirit’s influence on the human authors. Our analysis of II Timothy 3:16-17, especially the emphasis on ‘all Scripture is God-breathed,’ gives us textual evidence for such a view of Scripture.

Biblical inspiration is *plenary*, that is, it extends to all parts of the canonical text as recognized throughout Church history, from Genesis to Revelation. In other words, evangelical theology does not embrace a partial inspiration of Scripture which seeks to consider some parts of the canon as authentic while considering others to be inauthentic. We believe

¹⁵ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: God, Authority, and Salvation*. San Francisco Harper & Row Publishers, 1978, 51.

that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work,” II Timothy 3:16-17. We affirm the authority of all Scripture, Old and New Testaments, though we acknowledge that the author of II Tim. 3:16-17 had the Old Testament in mind. The key issues in the canonization of certain books revolved around whether a biblical book met the “standard” not whether biblical books were inspired. In other words, canonization of Scripture highlighted that “all Scripture” was regarded inspired.

Biblical inspiration is *confluent*, that is, the human and the divine element work hand-in-hand. A healthy view of biblical inspiration should acknowledge that God and the human authors and/or the believing communities interacted in the inspiration process. Although God used the different authors of Scripture to produce what He wanted them to write, He did not suppress their personalities and literary styles. Consequently, the individual personalities and skills of the Bible authors are displayed overtly in the different books.

Indeed, although the human activity involved the historical research and logical reasoning, God through his Holy Spirit superintended and directed the entire process so that the final product was what God wanted to be written. In other words, while we emphasize the divine origin of the Scriptures, we do not overlook or forget that the human authors used various sources, syntax, words, and media to convey their messages (“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various way, . . .” Heb. 1:1; “. . . but men spoke

from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit,” II Pet. 1:21b). Stott is correct when he succinctly explains the relation between God and the human authors in the writing of the Scriptures:

On the one hand, God spoke, deciding what he wished to say, although without crushing the personality of the human authors. On the other hand, men spoke, using their human faculties freely, though without distorting the message of the divine author. This double authorship of Scripture naturally affects the way the evangelical reads his Bible. Because it is God’s Word, he reads it like no other book, paying close attention to the context, structure, grammar, and vocabulary.¹⁶

Therefore, we affirm that the Scriptures came into existence as a direct result of God’s will. This is very pivotal in understanding the nature and authority of the Bible. We believe that God has revealed himself through the Scriptures so that human beings will know his will for their lives. As a book written by human beings under the influence of the Spirit of God, the Bible was written at different time and places; it is effected by a variety of personal styles and thought patterns with certain emphases and perspectives; and it is expressed in human words, phrases, and sentences that reflected the worldview of their contemporary world.

An affirmation of the dual authorship of the Bible does not lead inevitably to the position that, because human beings are fallible, all works which they produce are also fallible. We must recognize, on the one hand, the finite (that is, limited) dimensions at work in Scripture (these writers of Scripture did not know everything about everything); yet

¹⁶ John R.W. Stott. “Are Evangelicals Fundamentalists?” Christianity Today 22, (1978) 44-46S.

the guiding hand of the Spirit of God was also actively involved in the production of these works, (cf. II Peter 1:21 “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”).

As the Word of God, the Bible is trustworthy in all it affirms. God guided the human authors so that their words would convey the thoughts he wished conveyed. All Scripture is important and profitable for God’s people, though not all is directly applicable. However, two key implications of a healthy understanding of biblical inspiration are (1) the reliability and authority of Scripture. We need to trust and obey the Word of God; and (2) the importance of the very words of Scripture. We need to study the Scriptures exegetically, with an eye for detail. It is this written text, the Scriptures, which we need to pay attention to as we listen to the voice of the Spirit of God now guiding us to understand the text.

2. Biblical Inspiration Does Not Guarantee or Imply Inerrancy:

Before we get into the actual nitty gritty of this point it is expedient that we clarify the difference between ‘inerrancy’ and ‘infallibility,’ two important terms often employed in the context of the nature of scriptural authority.

These terms are believed by some to be on the same etymological grounds, although applied differently. According to Elwell, to the ordinary reader infallibility and inerrancy are “virtually synonymous.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984, 142

Ostensibly, The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is rather ambiguous in its definitions of these two terms: '*Infallibility* signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters. Similarly, *inerrant* signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.'

¹⁸

There are at least two major issues that arise among Christians from any attempt to distinguish between the meanings of these two (infallibility and inerrancy) terms. On the one hand, there are those who believe that anything said or stated in the Bible must be true and reliable because the Bible is God's inspired Word. The fundamental premise or understanding of this argument is that God cannot and does not lie "therefore whatever he says in the Bible must be true, and hence the Bible must be infallible and inerrant."¹⁹ This is often referred to by some as 'the inerrancy of Scripture only in the original autographs.' Warfield attempts to delineate the issue:

The present controversy concerns something much more vital than the bare "inerrancy" of the Scriptures, whether in the copies or in the "autographs." It concerns the trustworthiness of the Bible in its express declarations, and in the fundamental conceptions of its writers as to the course of the history of God's

¹⁸ Norman L. Geisler, ed. *Inerrancy*, Appendix. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980, 500.

¹⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration*. London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1982, 51.

dealings with his people. It concerns, in a word, the authority of the Biblical representations concerning the nature of revealed religion, and the mode and course of its revelation. The issue raised is whether we are able to look upon the Bible as containing a divinely guaranteed and wholly trustworthy account of God's redemptive revelation, and the course of his gracious dealings with his people, or as merely a mass of more or less trustworthy materials, out of which we are to sift the facts in order to put together a trustworthy account of God's redemptive revelation and the course of his dealings with his people.²⁰

On the other hand, there are those who have concluded that the Bible is the Word of God, and that it does contain errors and contradictions. For this group of scholars the very nature of the Bible is believed to argue against inerrancy. In a word, this group attempts to place side by side the divine book with its human features. Although the Bible is the inspired Word of God to human beings, this group says that there are passages in the Bible where human beings are speaking to God. It has been argued that "the Bible functions not just as a record of God's teaching to man, but also as a record of how people have thought about God and responded to him."²¹

With views like these in mind, others have consequently concluded and argued for the entire inerrancy of Scripture.²² Bahnsen reasons:

Nevertheless, according to the attitude of the biblical writers, who could and did

²⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," reprinted in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 581-82.

²¹ Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration*, 56.

²² Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Inerrancy of the Autographa" in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Books, 1980, 151-193.

distinguish copies from the autographa, copies of the Bible serve the purposes of revelation and function with authority only because they are assumed to be tethered to the autographic text and its criteriological authority. The evangelical doctrine pertains to the autographic text, not the autographic codex, and maintains that present copies and translations are inerrant to the extent that they accurately reflect the biblical originals; thus the inspiration and inerrancy of present Bibles is not an all-or-nothing matter. . . . The importance of original inerrancy is not that God cannot accomplish His purpose except through a completely errorless text, but that without it we cannot consistently confess His veracity, be fully assured of the scriptural promise of salvation, or maintain the epistemological authority and theological axiom of *sola Scriptura* (since errors in the original, unlike those in transmission, would not be correctable in principle).²³

Others view inerrancy as applying “equally to all the parts of the Bible as originally written. This means that no present manuscript or copy of Scripture, no matter how accurate, can be called inerrant.”²⁴

It becomes clear that the debate between infallibility and inerrancy is far from being resolved. In fact, statements like the one Bahnsen raise difficult theological issues. Does biblical inspiration imply inerrancy and/or infallibility? What does infallibility mean? What does inerrancy mean? Is there exegetical evidence for inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture?

In this study we have already underlined the importance of formulating a theology that is rooted in the text. We have constantly argued that the text, the Bible, is and should be, our final judge in what to believe about God and how we ought to conduct our lives as Christians.

²³ Ibid., 192.

²⁴ Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary*, 142.

So, what does the Bible tell us about ‘inerrancy’ and ‘infallibility?’

Elwell’s definition of inerrancy is worth noting especially as we try to grasp what is considered to be the evangelical position. He explains:

Inerrancy is the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or the social, physical, or life sciences.²⁵

Usually, there are three arguments presented in support for inerrancy of Scripture²⁶:

(1) Biblical Argument - the belief that inerrancy is really the heart and testimony of Scripture. The argument flows as follows (a) the Bible’s teaching on inspiration requires inerrancy (II Timothy 3:16); (b) Absolute truthfulness is the mark of a divine message (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22); (c) the Bible teaches its own authority, and this in turn calls for inerrancy (Matt. 5:17-20; John 10:34-35); (d) Scripture employs Scripture in a manner that espouses its inerrancy Matt. 22:32; Gal. 3:16); and (e) the doctrine of inerrancy is believed to have been derived from what the Bible says about God, that is, He can not lie (Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29; Titus 1:2).

(2) Historical Argument - this is the understanding that biblical inerrancy has been the church’s position throughout its history. This is normally dated back to the two Reformers, Martin Luther and John

²⁵ Ibid., 142.

²⁶ Ibid., 142-143.

Calvin, who bore witness to the infallibility of Scripture.

(3) Epistemological Argument - this position is formulated on the understanding that knowledge claims must be 'indubitable or incorrigible' to be justified. A belief must move beyond doubt and question. Thus inerrancy warrants biblical incorrigibility. Indeed, all these arguments for biblical inerrancy have been challenged by some and alternate views have been presented.²⁷

The concept of rationally establishing inerrancy implies that we possess a standard *independent* of Scripture by which to determine or judge that Scripture is the unerring standard for all knowing, feeling, experiencing, understanding, and reasoning which purports to be about God.

Traditionally, reason has been regarded as one such standard, though it was never conceived as entirely independent of Scripture, since tradition is a form of handed on rationality, which as such shapes our critical instincts and habits of mind before we come to apply these to Scripture. The relation, if it is to work in the context of the life of faith, must be reciprocal, but one in which the precedent of Scripture, and the acts in history whose meaning it delineates, has greater authority. Authority is clearly what Calvin sees in the question of inspiration,

²⁷ Ibid. For a detailed discussion on objections to inerrancy see pages 144-145.

particularly, authority as attaching to the origin of the Scriptures.²⁸ The author's identity, God, is what gives Scripture its authority. It is not, therefore, its intrinsic constitution, but its relationship to God which gives Scripture its place of privilege in our lives.

A healthy understanding of the inspiration of Scripture affirms the anthropological activity in bringing the present form of the Bible while at the same time coordinating this with its divine origin, God. It is also helpful to remember that inspiration is a metaphor, as God, thought living, is not respirating. The meaning of II Timothy 3:16-17 is fairly clear. Scripture is from God, God-breathed, and that warrants its normative use in Christian living. We have considered other Scripture passages including II Peter 2:20-21, to show that God is, indeed, the ultimate author of Scripture. Although the actual details of this human-divine relationship is not delineated in the texts under consideration. Actually, this study is a reflection of the extent of this on-going attempt to understand the relationship between the divine and the human activity in the shaping of the text. However, we can still conclude that Scripture is

²⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on II Corinthians, I & II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* transl. T.A. Smail. Volume 10 of the New Testament Commentaries. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964. On II Tim. 3:14, "This passage teaches us that we should exercise the same care both to avoid false assurance in matters that are uncertain, that is, all the things that men teach, and hold the truth of God with unshaken firmness. . . . There is nothing more alien to faith than an easy credulity that bids us accept everything indiscriminately no matter what source may be, for the chief foundation of faith is to know that it has its origin and authority in God," (p.329). A little later, commenting on II Timothy 3:16, Calvin is somewhat firmer than we would expect, given the heuristic tone of the just quoted passage. He speaks of inspiration as implying that the Holy Spirit "dictated" what they said. He seems to have an illumination in mind, since he speaks of the teachings of Scripture as "not produced by men's minds as their source," (p. 330).

true, wisdom-forming words, and able to lead people to salvation through Jesus Christ. But again, we should realize that human redaction (like Luke's studying up before composing his account of the Gospel, Luke 1:1-4) does render possible the fundamentalist view that the Bible is objectively, and this can only mean without recourse to the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds here and now, a divine commodity. The Bible, in and of itself is God's Word, mind and will, just like the tree is what it is quite apart from any human perception or consideration of it. However, we must be careful not to personify the Bible or to equate it with God himself.

In this respect, it is important that we legitimately separate the questions of inspiration and infallibility from those of inerrancy. Inerrancy is indefensible. In keeping with our emphasis on appealing to and deriving theological truths from the Scriptures, we must painfully conclude that there is no verse (text) that says explicitly Scripture is inerrant. Biblical inerrancy is a product of implications by or simply follows from several things believed to be grounded in the Bible. As already mentioned, despite all the numerous books and articles written to support the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, there is no exegetical evidence for it. It is merely a theological deduction.

Infallibility, however, is what we mean when we claim that the Scriptures can and do unfailingly lead us to the knowledge of salvation (not physics, calculus or geometry), and inspiration, which claims that living witnesses were taken up by the Spirit of God and in such a state received knowledge and insight into God's will and purpose. Thus out of

this, the human agents wrote and spoke with God's divine authority. Packer explains 'infallibility' as "the quality of never deceiving or misleading, and so means 'wholly trustworthy and reliable.'"²⁹ In other words, what the Scriptures say is to be considered infallible because God is infallible. We can accept the fact that the Bible is the Word of God, it is true and reliable, without meaning that it is literally true in all its parts. Yes, the Bible is inspired. The insights and values contained in the Scriptures are human creations under the influence of the Spirit of God. Although biblical inspiration is God initiated, in actual fact, it really unites the believing community and God. In this understanding of biblical inspiration there is no hint to 'inerrancy.' In all fairness to the key biblical passages on inspiration we have analysed in this study, reference to inerrancy of scientific and historical data is neither mentioned nor implied. For any exegete to push for inerrancy from texts like II Timothy 3:15-17, II Peter 1:20-21, and/or others is really a result of bringing pre-conceived notions concerning the nature of biblical inspiration and merely citing these texts to undergird one's own particular approach to Scripture. Such an approach to theology leaves a lot to be desired with respect to the authority of Scripture. There is no reference to inerrancy and/or infallibility of scientific and historical data.

In his book, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice*, Johnston classifies various conservative theologians into four categories:³⁰

²⁹ Packer, 'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God, 95.

³⁰ Robert Johnston, *Evangelicals at Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice*. Atlanta: Knox Press, 1979, 19-34.

(1) *Detailed Inerrancy* - This position was advocated and popularized by Francis Schaeffer, Harold Lindsell (as depicted in his book, *Battle for the Bible*) and others who argued that all Christians must adhere to a total doctrine of Scripture's full inspiration and perfect testimony in the areas of faith, practice, and all matters of science as well as history. These advocates refuse any form of fellowship to anyone who does not embrace this position.

(2) *Irenic Inerrancy or Flexible Inerrancy* - Theologians like Clark Pinnock (as argued in his book, *Set Forth Your Case: A Defense of Biblical Infallibility and Biblical Revelation*) and Daniel Fuller propose that we must view the text (the Bible) as infallible, that is, incapable of deception, and inerrant, that is, without error in what it says or affirms. However, there is one qualification here. We must admit that the biblical writers' views of science and history differ from ours, so what might appear to us as errors are not really errors, especially given their context. Consequently, they conclude that items which are incidental are not part of what the Scriptures intend to teach; they are simply non-revelatory matters.

(3) *Complete Infallibility* - This position is embraced by theologians like David Hubbard, Paul Jewett (both of Fuller Theological Seminary) and others. They prefer to avoid the use of the word "inerrancy" and use only *infallibility*. The idea here is to try to enable the theologians to read the Bible in order to address the problems faced by the Church today. Technically, the message of the text is to be seen beyond the cultural limitations of that era.

(4) *Partial Infallibility* - Individuals like Dewey Beegle (*Inspiration of Scripture and Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*) and Stephen Davis (*The Debate About the Bible*) vehemently attack the position of biblical inerrancy as rationalistic, obscurantistic, obsessed, and docetic. These theologians conclude that the Bible has some errors in matters of scientific and historical detail, but it is infallible in matters of faith and practice.

Partial Infallibility is certainly the category that best suits what we have advocated and argued for in this study. However, we would not employ the use of such strong words like ‘rationalistic, obscurantistic, obsessed, and docetic,’ for those who argue for inerrancy.

As already highlighted in the beginning of this subheading ‘2. *Inspiration Does Not Guarantee Inerrancy*,’ our position is that the Bible does have some errors in scientific matters and historical detail, but it is infallible in matters pertaining to what we need to know about God, the way of salvation, eschatological details, et cetera, and how we ought to conduct our lives. Therefore, we conclude that a healthy understanding of the doctrine of biblical inspiration leads us to the realization that inspiration does not guarantee inerrancy. The Bible is not to be used as a text for all academic disciplines. When we read in Joshua 10:13 that “The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day,” we can conclude that there is no element of deception in the text. We know scientifically that the sun is not moving, in actual fact it is the earth that is rotating around the sun. Therefore, we can say that the text is infallible, we can trust the text with the knowledge that science has

given us better tools to know better. This does not in any way undermine or nullify the credibility of the Bible. The Bible is a divine revelation from God, a standard for measuring theological truth and its practical implications in life of the believer.

3. Biblical Inspiration is Different from Illumination: There are at least four views³¹ on biblical inspiration that have risen in connection with illumination:

(1) The intuition theory: Basically, this makes biblical inspiration a high level of insight; a high gift, like that of an artist. In this theory, the human authors of the Scriptures are simply geniuses, those with special aptitude for languages and writing. Consequently, the Bible is basically a religious document that reflects the spiritual experiences of the believing community. In this theory, inspiration rests on the writers not the text. The human authors are no different from any other religious or mystic thinkers like Buddha, Plato, et cetera.

(2) The illumination theory: This view recognizes that there was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the human authors of Scripture. However, this influence involved only a heightening of their senses. Basically, these writers became increasingly sensitive and perceptive to spiritual matters because the Holy Spirit heightened their consciousness.

(3) The dynamic theory: This view recognizes the combination of the two parties, God and man working together in the production of the

³¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991, 206-207.

Bible. Here, the understanding is that God directed the writers to the ideas they were to have but the writers creatively crafted and expressed these notions in their own distinctive ways. In other words, each of the Bible authors had the freedom to express their God-given thoughts in a manner that manifested their individual personality.

(4) The verbal theory: This view highlights that the Holy Spirit's influence on the writers resulted in their choosing the exact words God wanted them to use in order to communicate His message. Although this view holds that was not dictation, the intensity of the Holy Spirit is believed to have resulted in the use of the exact words or expressions God desired to communicate His word to human beings.

(5) The dictation theory: This view teaches that God dictated to the writers what He wanted them to write. In other words, there is no credit given to the human authors. Actually, Scripture passages like Jeremiah 30:1 “. . . Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you;” Jer. 36:2 “Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, . . .” and others where God instructed someone to write things down are understood to be referring to the writing of the entire Bible.

In evangelical theology, the doctrine of illumination is understood to be “that ministry of the Holy Spirit that helps the believer understand the truth of Scripture.”³² Elwell explains:

In relation to the Bible, the doctrine of revelation relates to the unveiling of truth in

³² Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 545.

the material of the Scriptures; inspiration concerns the method by which the Holy Spirit superintends 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.³³

Donald Bloesch clarifies further the difference between inspiration and illumination when he says:

Inspiration, which pertains basically to the verbal witness of the prophets and apostles and which is completed, is to be distinguished from illumination, which denotes the ongoing action of the Spirit in awakening men and women in every age to the truth of what is given in Scripture.³⁴

There are several texts in the Bible that seem to support the doctrine of illumination. Only but a few texts will suffice this point:

I Cor. 2:14 “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

I Cor. 3:1-3 “Bothers and sisters, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?”

Ephesians 1:18-19 “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: God, Authority & Salvation*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978, 55.

you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”

John 16:12-15 “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”

In his book, *Basic Theology*, Ryrie highlights six important facts about the biblical concept of illumination:³⁵ (1) the Spirit is the teacher, and His presence in the believer guarantees the availability of this ministry to all believers; (2) unbelievers, therefore, cannot experience this ministry; (3) the Spirit’s teaching encompasses “all the truth,” including that of “things to come,” that is, prophecy; (4) carnality in the believer can thwart this ministry; (5) the purpose of the Spirit’s ministry is to glorify Christ; and (6) the Spirit will use those who have the gift of teaching to carry out His ministry.

It is important to note that there is no indication that illumination is equivalent to a direct revelation from God. In fact, illumination is an ongoing process and essential experience of the church and of the individual believer. God continues to illumine his people as they walk with him. This may occur from an interaction with the Scriptures or simply as God’s Spirit prompts the human heart. The Holy Spirit gave and continues to give understanding to the community of faith and to

³⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986, 116.

individuals so that they can interpret the Scriptures. Consider the wise words of Packer on the activity of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers as they interact with the Scriptures:

There is no such thing as an exhaustive exegesis of any passage. The Holy Spirit is constantly showing Christian men facets of revealed truth not seen before. To claim finality for any historic mode of interpretation or system of theology would be to resist the Holy Ghost; there is always more to be said, and the Church of each age should echo John Robinson's confidence that the Lord has more light and truth yet to break out of His holy Word. Our point here is simply that the Church must receive all teaching that proves to be biblical, whether on matters of historical or of theological fact, as truly part of God's Word.³⁶

Indeed, this is part of the ongoing hermeneutics in theology. This theological discipline should not be confused for inspiration, that process that led to the formation and crystallization of the Scriptures as we have them today. Clark Pinnock succinctly explains the evangelical view of the connection between illumination and the Scriptures:

The Spirit works to bring each generation of believers as close to the Lord as the first apostles were and enables them to penetrate the same truth in relation to their different context. It is not that a new message will be given, but that the old message will continue to be made effective by the Spirit, as he helps us to reinterpret and apply the truth once delivered to meet new challenges.³⁷

There seems to be a clear distinction between biblical inspiration and

³⁶ Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God*, 89.

³⁷ Pinnock. *The Scripture Principle*, 13.

illumination. Inspiration is that process by which the Holy Spirit moved in the community of faith and individual believers to produce the Scriptures, while illumination is the Holy Spirit's work of assisting those reading the Scriptures to understand what is written and apply it to their lives today. In one sense, the ancient communities of faith illumined as they employed their perceptions and speculations as they gave shape to the biblical texts. However, today we experience a similar illumination as the Holy Spirit communicates with us through the completed Scriptures. In other words, we are not being illumined in order to 'write' or 're-write' the Bible, but rather to comprehend what 'stands written' in the Bible. All the illumination and clarification we receive as we exegete the Scriptures ought to be weighed by what has already been disclosed to us definitively and conclusively in the Scriptures. This is true because, as evangelicals, our study of the Scriptures has led us to the conclusion that the will and purpose of God have been fully revealed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the final and complete revelation of God.

4. Inspiration Means the Bible is Authoritative: A lot of the current theological discussions and heated arguments arise from 'the authority of the Bible.' It has become increasingly apparent that the real battleground in most theological circles, especially the difference between evangelical and liberal scholarship, is biblical authority. Does the Bible have *authority*? And if the Bible has authority, what kind of authority does it have? Does the authority rest in the Bible or the people of God who gave shape to the Scriptures?

In evangelical circles, to affirm that the Bible is inspired leads to the conclusion that the Bible is an authoritative book. Most evangelical churches and Christian organizations affirm in their Articles of Faith (Statement of Faith) that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is their final authority in matters of faith and conduct. This is the camp from which this entire study was borne. We agree with Grenz who says:

Properly understood, biblical authority must be affirmed as wide in scope, even all-encompassing for our lives as believers. Evangelicals are in basic agreement that biblical writers claim authority in what we often call “matters of faith and practice.” The Bible’s authoritative status radiates outward from any narrow conception of this phrase, however, until it encompasses all of life. This phenomenon is a function of the all-encompassing nature of religious conviction.³⁸

In a word, this commitment to the Bible, for the evangelical, is really crucial because it establishes the foundation for our worldview. The Bible forms that framework from which we can analyse, interpret and make meaning out of our human experiences and search for truth. We believe that biblical inspiration attests to God’s work in the community of faith to produce a text (the Bible) that is normative for the community of faith. Basically, the Bible becomes that standard for measuring truth about who God is and how believers in this God ought to conduct their lives. Thus, we affirm that the Bible is our final authority in matters of faith and practice. This is our presupposition about the Bible and we do not apologize for being evangelical. We do not, however, claim that the Bible

³⁸ Stanley J. Grenz. *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993, 134.

is the only essential source for knowledge about God and the universe. That would be absolute foolishness on our part to take such a naive position. There are numerous truths we can learn about God and the universe when we analyse the amazing order of complex things in the world, the rigorous ways of natural law, the ancient world(s), the nature of living things, the early history of all mankind, the puzzling role of the stars and galaxies, and other disciplines. Surely, the Bible is not the only way one can know the truth about God and the universe. Paul, the apostle, declared, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that human beings are without excuse,” (Romans 1:20).

However, we must also hasten to mention that the Bible was never meant to be a scientific textbook. It is a theology textbook. Theology is a science; it deals with knowledge. There are some historical and quasi-scientific statements in the Bible. We have already discussed this point in detail and concluded in this chapter, under paragraph # 2 above, that biblical inspiration does not guarantee inerrancy, but rather infallibility. So, we agree with Spong who says:

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 from Matthew,

Mark, Luke, and John, to say nothing except blank stares of incredulity.³⁹

Barr is also correct when he concludes:

The Bible contains statements that are not factually accurate and statements that are discrepant with other biblical statements; and it contains, at the very least, theological assertions that differ in tendency and emphasis from others within the Bible. As 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.⁴⁰

However, all this does not undermine or nullify the authority or supremacy of the Bible as a normative document for Christians or the Church. Furthermore, even though the Scriptures emerged from the tradition of the believing community, the nature of Scripture, that it is *God-breathed*, calls for its supremacy over the believing community. This is why we have argued throughout this study that inspiration rests within the text. It is the text, the written text, that is God-breathed. II Timothy 3:16-17, among other biblical passages we have mentioned in this study, declares that “All Scripture is God-breathed (inspired) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Although by “Scripture” Paul was thinking about the collection of Hebrew Scripture, the Protestant evangelical Christianity has, over the past hundreds of years, come to understand that “this Scripture” includes

³⁹ John Shelby Spong. *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991, 25.

⁴⁰ James Barr. *Beyond Fundamentalism: Biblical Foundations for Evangelical Christianity*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984, 129.

the Christian books that make up the sixty-six (66) books of the modern Protestant Christian Bible. This position definitely sets our point of departure from other theological camps insofar as how this body of “God-breathed/inspired” literature is to be handled or understood. Grenz sums it up when he says:

In addition to the centrality of biblical authority in the broader evangelical tradition, contemporary “card-carrying” evangelicals continue to set forth the concern for biblical theology and the defense of biblical doctrine inherited from the older fundamentalism out of which we emerged. As evangelicals we adamantly maintain that not only at its core but also at every juncture, systematic theology must remain true to the doctrine of the apostles and prophets and that biblical teaching must be applied to life as the standard for Christian conduct.⁴¹

Evangelicals have always endeavoured to take the Bible as God’s Word for mankind. Thus, the Bible has a special place in the formulation of the evangelical ethos and practice. Hence, there is that dual emphasis on commitment to orthodoxy (what we believe) and orthopraxis (practising what we believe).

II Timothy 3:16-17, among other passages, is definitely an important passage in the discussion about biblical inspiration, and we have analysed it in greater detail in chapters 3 and 4. Our exegetical analysis of the biblical data has led to the conclusion that the Scriptures, that canon of the Bible which contains both the Hebrew and Christian books in their definitive form, must be considered normative. We have argued consistently that inspiration rests with the text (*“All Scripture is*

⁴¹ Grenz, *Evangelical Theology*, 105.

God-breathed . . .”), not the writers. Thus, we place a lot of weight on the text, the Bible, as we have it in its final compositional canonical form. We put such emphasis on the Scriptures (the Bible) as an authoritative document for two reasons:

(1) Although there is a co-authorship (God and human beings) in the production of the Scriptures, II Timothy 3:16 declares openly that God is the author. Thus, the Bible is a special book, “*All Scripture is God-breathed . . .* ;” written according to what God wanted recorded. Yes, the human authors gave shape to the biblical texts as they compiled and arranged data under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

(2) If God is the author of Scripture, and we believe he is, then human beings ought to listen up, pay attention to what God has revealed and communicated. Because their resultant origin, the Scriptures become like the owner’s manual. Perhaps this why II Timothy 3:16-17 says “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful* for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” God being the Creator and has spoken (revealed himself to us, human beings) through Scripture, we would be wise to heed his message. Such an understanding, among evangelical Christians, gives the Bible an authoritative position insofar as knowing God and living lives that honour him is concerned.

The issue we must address at this juncture is whether there is textual evidence for elevating the Bible to such an authoritative position. Does the Bible teach that it is to be regarded as a final authority in matters of what to believe about God and how people ought to conduct

their lives? Does the evangelical understanding of biblical authority hold water either theologically or exegetically? Is there theological support for considering normativity of Scripture?

The evangelical notion of biblical inspiration affirms that Scripture is, indeed, normative for theology. Theology is a human endeavour and it has limitations. The wise words of Schneiders are worth noting as we attempt to understand task and complexity of theology. She says:

Theology is not the business of describing accurately (not to mention exhaustively!) the nature, attributes, operations, and designs of God, which are finally unknowable to humans. It is a disciplined reflection of the Holy Mystery that attempts to say, in coherent ways, what (little) it can see, in the hope of guiding the vision of others. . . surely we must acknowledge that the mystery of God so far transcends our relational capacity that our knowledge will never be exhaustive or even relatively commensurate with the mystery.⁴²

What we think (our presuppositions) about the Bible will, by and large, determine how we use or apply biblical truth. Furthermore, our presuppositions form our notion of biblical authority. There are at least nine (9) unbalanced views toward the Bible which are unhealthy.⁴³ We will discuss briefly each one of these unhealthy views about the Bible and their flaws: (1) The Bible as a “Road Map to Heaven.” This is the Bible of some evangelist. Basically, the Bible is viewed to be a map, showing us how to get to heaven and how we are to live on our way to heaven.

⁴² Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 57.

⁴³ Kenneth W. Shoemaker, Lecture Notes & Discussion “Hermeneutics TH 503” at Prairie Graduate School, Three Hills, Alberta, Canada. July 1991.

This approach places tremendous emphasis on salvation and especially the Gospel. It does not give adequate attention to the context of a given text. One who reads a map seeks specific personal application to an immediate issue (finding out how to get from point A to B) and is hardly concerned with background issues, like who created the map and for what purposes. All that really matters in this approach is that the map should be accurate and dependable whenever we need to refer to it as we journey through.

(2) The Bible as a book of Mystery of Magic. This is the Bible of the mystics. This view of the Bible begins with the premise that since the Bible is the Word of God, it is somehow supernatural. It then proceeds to the position that the ‘supernatural’ dimension must be expressed in deep, mysterious ways when speaking of the true meaning of reality. Mystical, here, is the notion of having a spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence; it is based upon intuition insight, or similar subjective experience. Instead of trying to find meaning in the text through rational, exegetical means of studying God’s Word, this approach holds that the Bible was written in a type of spiritual code, a mystery which must first be understood before true meaning can be perceived. Often times, according this view, the “deeper spiritual meanings” of Scripture are lost on those who are not “spiritually attuned” or who do not know the secret keys which unlock the mysteries of God’s Word.

The problem with this approach is that it is highly subjective, speculative, and whimsical. It presumes that there “is a code” to be

discovered, and that someone has actually discovered the key to the code needed to unlock the mysteries. One can prove almost anything from the Bible in this approach. This is why some Bible scholars have come up with biblical numerology, theometrics/theonomics, allegorical interpretations, and the Jewish Kabbala.⁴⁴

In his well written article “A Cracked Code”⁴⁵ Witherington correctly argues that the present day preoccupation with Bible codes is erroneous. He says, “It is not the form of the Scriptures or the sequence of its letters that conveys its truth, but rather the content of the book.”⁴⁶

(3) The Bible as a Devotional Book. This is the Bible of the personal pietists. This approach usually is concerned about one’s personal relationship with God, and one’s development of Christian character. Personal holiness and fervent devotion for the Lord are very high priorities. Often times, the Bible is treated like a personal love letter from God to the individual believer. Hence, personal application of biblical truth is a preoccupation of this approach.

The problem with this approach is that one ends up, usually,

⁴⁴ Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 598. “An esoteric mystic lore of Judaism, passed as secret doctrine to only the chosen few. . . What is most distinctive is the hermeneutical principle of finding hidden meanings in the texts of Scriptures. Human language in Scripture is examined not only allegorically and analogically, but also through the interpretation of words and letters according to their numerical equivalents, and by interchanging numerical equivalents new letters and words could be created, thereby allowing for new interpretations.”

⁴⁵ Ben Witherington III, “A Cracked Code” in *Christianity Today*: July 12, 1999, 60. He points out that there are at least three fundamental problems with the Bible codes being popularized by writers like Michael Drosnin as discussed in his book, *The Bible Code*, 1997. These codes are arrived at by (1) quirky methods, (2) deliberate mistranslations, and (3) false representations.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

interested in finding God's will for their life for today; a focus on immediate relevance; and a focus on "What does the Bible mean to me?" The other problem with this approach is that, for those who passionately embrace this view of the Bible, an intellectual approach to Scripture, theology, and philosophy is suspicious and is something to be minimized, if not avoided. The highly personalized focus of the devotional method often leaves little room for serious exegesis, nor does it place adequate emphasis on the application of Scripture to social issues, politics, the sciences, the arts, et cetera.

(4) The Bible as a Great Inspiring Literature. This is the Bible of those who appreciate art. Basically, this approach holds the Bible in high respect for its literary achievements. The Bible is known around the world for its lofty thoughts of God, stories of real heroes and heroines who are also frail human beings like we are, the high ideals of faith and hope, and love, and its encouragement and consolation when one is wrestling with the difficult issues of life.

The problem with this approach is that it over-emphasizes the literary aspect at the expense of the divine element. It is true that much of the Bible should be categorized as great literature. However, although the Bible is all entirely "inspired," not everyone would agree that it is all "inspiring." Definitely, the genealogies are not all that "inspiring." The real major danger with this approach to the Bible is that the spiritual purpose, the authorial intention, of the Bible is often overlooked or minimized when viewed simply as great literature.

(5) The Bible as a History Book. This is the book of the historian.

This approach concentrates on the historical, cultural or archaeological materials of the Bible. Often those who view the Bible in this manner are most interested in seeing history as the recounting of what happened.

The problem of this view is that it overlooks the fact that there is much more to the Bible than history. Certainly much of the Bible is history in nature, but there is much more there as well, including theology, Christian living, *et cetera*.

(6) The Bible as a Book of Predictions. This is the Bible of the futurist. Here, the predictive sections of the Bible are highlighted and used to look into the future to see things which “the world of natural human beings” does not perceive. The predictions of the Old Testament prophets, Jesus Christ’s Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24), and the book of Revelation are given prominence in this approach to the Bible. There is more concern with the “then” of the future than with the “now” of today. In fact, when “today” is addressed by those who favour this approach, it is done with the clear focus on tomorrow. A good example of this is the evangelistic techniques found in some circles, “Jesus Christ is coming back soon! Will you be ready to meet him at he Rapture?”

There is a fundamental problem with this approach. It often minimizes the Bible’s relevance to the many other immediate needs of today, both personal and social. Furthermore, it also allows one to neglect a close walk with God and personal obedience to all of God’s commands.

(7) The Bible as a Doctrinal Textbook. This is the Bible of the dogmatist. Basically, the biblical content is regarded as propositional (assertive); as objective. The historical and cultural context of Scripture is

to be stripped away so as to reveal pure truth.

The problem here is that this view accentuates the mental, cognitive approach to Bible study. Usually, the spiritual dimension of Scripture is ignored.

(8) The Bible as a Rulebook. This is the Bible of the legalist or literalist. This approach sees the Bible as a book of Law. God's will is revealed in terms of commandments and prohibitions: "(Thou) You shall" and "Shall not."

The problem with this approach is that the Christian life is viewed as the strict obedience to these laws, and a good Christian is defined by how well he/she conforms to these standards. For the most part, the kind of standards advocated in this approach to Scripture end up not being really biblical ones, but rather man made standards. Performance, not heart attitude, becomes the measuring standard.

(9) The Bible as a Success Manual. This is the Bible of the spiritual achiever or the present day "name-it and grab-it" Christians. This is part of the "health and wealth gospel" floating around in some theological circles. This approach sees the teachings of the Bible as simply a blueprint for achieving happiness and material success in the world.

The problem with this view is that, while there is much Scripture to guide us toward happiness, success, and satisfaction, it is also clear that worldly fulfilment is temporary at best, and it is often gained only at the expense of compromising fundamental Christian values.

Two things are worthy noting here: (1) There is truth (to a greater

or lesser extent) in each one of these views about the Scriptures. However, no single view here accurately depicts the true nature of the Bible because different parts of Scripture emphasize different views. We must, therefore, try to find out what each of the authors of the Bible intended by their writings. Unfortunately, these authors are not around to respond to our queries and to have us observe their reactions. All we have before us is the text (the Bible) itself. We must, however, bear in mind that “even in the most optimal conditions of written communication, we will never be able to discover fully the precise intention of the author.”⁴⁷ Thus, the written text, the Bible in this case, is really “a reality unto itself.”⁴⁸ (2) The most serious danger is not having a holistic view of Scripture which allows for a multiplicity of true perspectives simultaneously. Once we lock ourselves into only one way of viewing Scripture and eliminate other true ways of viewing Scripture, we are guilty of distorting God’s Word. As a consequence, our interpretations can not help but be distorted also.

The Old Testament events were written “for our instruction,” “as example” - I Cor. 10:11 “These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.” II Timothy 3:17 shows us that the Scriptures are to equip us “so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” Thus, an unbalanced concentration on what the Bible says about the future, the past, or the present is unhealthy.

⁴⁷ Vogels, *Interpreting Scripture*, 77.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Vogels correctly argues that a healthy biblical interpretation is one that focuses on the world *within* the text.

What is needed is an appreciation and interest in what God says about the past, the present, and the future.

Once we have established (like we did in this study) that the Bible is the Word of God which has come to us through human authors, we must then face the tough issue of explaining how this Bible is to effect us today. In other words, we are advocating that the Bible possesses “authority” and evangelical Christians recognize this authority of the Bible because of its resultant origin, “God-breathed.” “Authority” is to be understood as power to guide and command, whether in thoughts, opinions, or behaviour. Thus, biblical authority is that innate power of the Scriptures (because they are the Word of the Sovereign God) to command the respect and obedience of human beings everywhere. We believe such an authority of the Bible is based on its claims of divine inspiration and on its claims of truth. In other words, because the ultimate source of the Bible is God, its authority is dependable and believed by evangelical Christianity to be binding upon all people. Thus, we affirm that the Bible is our standard for both faith in God and practice. It is our guide for truth and for how we should live our lives before God.

Even the Old Testament prophets, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, showed the authority of their God-given utterances; “But can I say just anything? I must speak only what God puts in my mouth,” (Numbers 22:38); “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue,” (II Samuel 23:2); “Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon me, and he told me to say, ‘This is what the Lord says: That is what you are saying, O house of Israel, but I know what is going through your mind,’”

(Ezekiel 11:5); and “As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord. “My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever,” (Isaiah 59:21). All this confirms the authority of the Word of God. Numerous times we hear the prophets uttering the expression, “Thus says the Lord . . .” as they communicated their prophetic oracles. This expression marked the beginning of an important message. It called the audience or recipient of the message to “Listen up! God is speaking to you.”

In this study, we are arguing for a view of Scripture that focuses on the canon of the Bible, that collection of Protestant (66) books as normative. We appeal to this authority of Scripture because we regard Scripture as the written Word of God. Such a view is not developed by zeroing on one or two Bible passages, but rather by studying Scripture as a unit. Hence, we have attempted to study the two important texts, namely, II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21, within the context of the rest of Scripture. We have established that there is ample exegetical evidence for the significance of biblical inspiration as well as the authority of Scripture from within Scripture itself.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Professor James Barr has made (and continues to make) significant contributions in the arena of theological trends. With numerous books and articles published, he has become one of the most recognizable contributors to biblical and theological studies. It goes without saying that he has emerged and gained a growing audience among theologians around the world. This dissertation has explicated and evaluated exegetically and theologically, Barr's view of biblical inspiration in the light of some of the most recent theological and exegetical developments.

Barr's view of biblical inspiration has to be analysed in the context of the liberal critical scholarship. He views the evangelical understanding of biblical inspiration and the related divine authority of the Bible as untenable. Since Scripture grew out of the community of faith (*God ÷ people ÷ tradition ÷ church*, not the traditional model *God ÷ revelation ÷ scripture ÷ church*),¹ Barr concludes that the Bible has no intrinsic authority over the believing community. The issue of biblical authority is really the battleground in Barr's preferred view of biblical inspiration. Hence, he proposes his preferred view of biblical inspiration and authority reflective of his presuppositions about the Bible. Barr affirms that authority resides in the community of faith rather than in the Bible. However, we must hasten to mention that we are not at all suggesting that

¹ Barr, *Scope & Authority*, 60.

all of Barr's views and criticisms against evangelical positions are invalid. Actually, this dissertation was borne from a recognition of the numerous valid points Barr makes in his publications.

Chapter One introduced the fundamental reasons for doing a dissertation of this nature. Professor Barr's was also introduced, mentioning some of his major published works as well as his contributions to biblical studies and theological trends. Barr was viewed as a representative of some of the current liberal nuances of biblical inspiration. Thus, justifying the reason for focussing on Barr while attempting to address the issues within a larger context.

Chapter Two covered the historical overview of the doctrine of biblical inspiration and the formation of the canon of the Scriptures. Different theological developments, starting with Roman Catholic Scholasticism through the Church Fathers and Reformers, were highlighted. The history of the evangelical view of biblical inspiration was also discussed. This chapter helped to place this study within a much wider arena of issues pertaining to biblical inspiration.

Chapter Three proceeded to delineate Barr's view of biblical inspiration as discussed in his published materials. We started off by evaluating his hermeneutical conclusions, then moved on to show his understanding of the term "inspiration" as well as his interpretations of II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:19-20. A summary of Barr's preferred view of biblical inspiration was also given.

Chapter Four analysed and evaluated Barr's interpretive conclusions on II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:19-20. An overview of

the exegetical issues in both biblical texts was given, respectively. The key exegetical words, namely, *B F* (D" NZ, 2, ` B<, LFJ@H and *Æ*" H |B48bF, TH were studied within their canonical contexts and how Barr chose to interpret them.

Chapter Five evaluated Barr's preferred view of biblical inspiration. His four conclusions on what inspiration is: (1) Inspiration is a minor note in Scripture; (2) Inspiration rests in the community of faith; (3) Inspiration includes current effects; and (4) Inspiration means Scripture is inspiring; were analysed and evaluated in the light of evangelical Christianity. His earlier two hermeneutical principles, namely, (1) Scripture is a product of the believing community, and (2) Inspiration does not guarantee inerrancy, were also discussed. The chapter ended by considering some practical implication of Barr's view of biblical inspiration on the Church and the individual believer.

Chapter Six dealt with the issue of biblical authority. We have shown that the issue of biblical authority is really the battleground between evangelical and liberal scholarship. The presuppositions one brings to the Bible determine how he or she handles the Bible. Barr has his preferred view of biblical authority. This was evaluated in the light of biblical data and apostolic tradition.

Chapter Seven dealt with how then we ought to think of biblical inspiration in the light of this study. The issue of the difference between a Euro-centric and a Afro-centric approach to theology was also touched on briefly. Four interpretive conclusions on biblical inspiration were presented, namely, (1) Inspiration means that the Bible is co-authored.

Human writers used sources, expressed their personalities in their literary styles, and God, by his Spirit, guided that entire process so that the ultimate product, the text, reflected what God wanted written; (2) Inspiration does not guarantee inerrancy, but rather infallibility; (3) Inspiration is not illumination or the ongoing theological/biblical discoveries we encounter in our study of the Scriptures; and (4) Inspiration means that Scripture is authoritative. We argued that the Bible is to be accepted as the final authority in matters of what to believe about God, how to be saved, and how to conduct our lives as believers.

Barr's preferred view of biblical inspiration is a deficient interpretation of II Timothy 3:16-17, II Peter 1:20-21, other Scripture passages, and a misunderstanding of the origin and resultant origin of the Scriptures.

Hence, from his interpretation of II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21, he argues that: (1) inspiration is a minor note in the Bible; (2) inspiration applies to the community of faith; (3) inspiration includes the contemporary effects of Scripture; and (4) inspiration means that Scripture is inspiring. All four interpretive conclusions reflect acceptance of critical views of authorship and dating, and the judgment is not from within Scripture as such. In other words, Barr's view of biblical inspiration is based on conventional liberal critics' theories, but there is no sound exegetical basis for their arguments.

Barr's use and understanding of the term "inspiration" is quite different from what we have advocated in this thesis. He certainly uses this term "inspiration" in a very broad sense rather than in its technical

biblical (New Testament) use. What does Barr really mean by "inspiration" as depicted in his writings?

Our understanding of Barr's view of biblical inspiration may be summarized as follows: Inspiration starts with God who inspired the believing community, the believing community began to write their thinking about God, what the community wrote about God became a body of inspired text (writings), thus the Bible (the sixty-six books as we have in the Protestant Bible) is only a selection from a larger body of also "inspired writings." The Bible is inspired (somehow, or rather indirectly) and it does not have an infallible degree of truth, historically and theologically. Furthermore, inspiration did not cease with the production of the Bible. The contemporary effects of Scripture on people is all part of the inspiration process. The term "inspiration" should be used in a non-restricted sense since it may mean different things to different people. Therefore, do not make a big issue out of this term "inspiration."

It is evident that Barr's use of the term "inspiration" may cover almost anything one might think inspiration means. Such a broad understanding of biblical inspiration leads to confusion because he is not really using the term "inspiration" carefully and in its technical usage. 1, ` B<, LFJ@His not a reference to a record of what people thought about God. 1, ` B<, LFJ@Hmeans that Scripture is ultimately God's product. It guarantees the absolute truthfulness and reliability of the Scriptures. Actually, Barr's view of biblical inspiration rejects the Bible as the final authority or objective standard of truth in matters of what to believe about God and how Christians should conduct their lives in relation to God.

How, then, should we think of inspiration? What is the evangelical basis for establishing the doctrine of biblical inspiration? Is there a biblical or theological basis for making biblical inspiration to be such a pivotal doctrine in the Scriptures?

In keeping with the thrust of this dissertation, that is, attempting to establish a biblical basis for theology from within the Scriptures, we must refer to the Scriptures from the offset. This approach is crucial because it minimizes the temptation to become philosophical without starting in the Word of God. From our exegetical and theological study, of II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:20-21 (among other biblical texts), and from an analysis of how Jesus Christ used the Old Testament (which was really Jesus' Bible and the Bible of the early church), and how the apostles used and taught from the Scriptures, we have argued that biblical inspiration means that God is the source of Scripture, and that Scripture is reliable,

truthful and normative.² Furthermore, we have argued that the process of biblical inspiration, is a divine creative literary activity involving numerous people, that led to the production of a normative God-breathed Scripture. This process cannot be delimited to the final redactor or compositor alone. God worked in and through countless individuals within the within the believing communities. The result was a God-breathed text which is absolutely reliable, truthful, and normative truth. The Bible is the inspired and absolutely truthful Word of God. We may not be able to explain every theological or exegetical difficulty in the Bible, but that does not nullify the Bible's authority as the standard for objective truth in the Christian faith. Perhaps some of those difficulties in Scripture are there to humble us and make us realize our human limitation as students of the Bible, while at the same time committing ourselves to

² Note that we have deliberately refrained from employing the phrase "inerrant in its autographs" for three reasons: (1) we have no copies or access to the original documents of the Bible (no one has copies of these original manuscripts); (2) the phrase presents a weak argumentation for explaining or clarifying difficulties or discrepancies in Scripture; and (3) the phrase suggests that the Bible (as we have it today) is not authoritative, truthful, reliable, if not erroneous. However, by refraining from using the phrase "inerrant in its autographs" we are admitting that there are factual difficulties in the Scripture. We do not have to attempt to deny that such difficulties exist in order to uphold the truthfulness of the Scriptures in what they affirm. It is alright to live with ambiguity (Afro-centric approach), unlike the Euro-centric approach to theology that attempts to systematically package or solve all mysteries. The key issue here is the total truthfulness of Scripture, which we absolutely affirm. However, at the same time, we are proposing that truthfulness does not necessarily imply precision. God used conscious individuals with their personalities and literary skills, to commit the Scriptures to paper. In any case, this way of explicating inerrancy does not settle all theological and exegetical difficulties in Scripture, but it surely disambiguates the traditional use of the term "inerrancy," although still affirming the infallibility of Scripture.

search the Scriptures in order to hear the voice God as recorded in the text.

How, then, does a renowned and clear-headed biblical scholar like Barr arrive at different interpretive conclusions from the same biblical passages? Are we simply measuring his view against the traditional stereo-type view?

We have consciously allowed Barr's views to challenge the evangelical orthodoxy. We concede that the criticism of the genus Barr characteristically brings to our attention invites us to reexamine (and sometimes adjust) our position. Barr is correct when he highlights that the inspiration process included and extended to the oral tradition, editing, selectivity, research, - to mention but a few of the components that led to the production of the Bible as we have it today.³ Furthermore, Barr challenges us to be self-critical of our own hermeneutical methodology. Indeed, we acknowledge his insights in triggering our minds to think about some of these issues.

However, Barr does not arrive at the same interpretive conclusions as we do because he begins on a different theological premise. His hermeneutical methodology is highly influenced by two tendentious interpretive assumptions: (1) Scripture is the product of the believing community, and (2) inspiration resides within the believing community. Hence, as a representative of liberal scholarship, Barr "does not regard the

³ With such a correct understanding of a broader view of biblical inspiration in mind, some of our current Systematic Theology statements seem nebulous in light of what II Timothy 3:16 states is inspired. It is Scripture that is "inspired." For instance, it seems rather unclear when Millard says, "The Spirit was apparently very selective in what *he inspired the biblical authors* to report," *Christian Theology*, 200. Italics mine.

divine authority of the Bible in its traditional form as tenable."⁴ As a result, his interpretive methodology is controlled by the theological presuppositions he brings to biblical study.

In this dissertation we have demonstrated that it is indispensable to establish a proper and sound foundation for biblical hermeneutics, for when the foundation is shaky, the entire structure collapses. There is a sense in which every time one turns the Scriptures in order to interpret a text, there are numerous other factors involved. Good hermeneutics require sound methodological rigour, such as assumptions, routines, classification, testing of data and drawing conclusions, and consideration for implications. In addition, we ought to be aware of that subjective human factor, in that interpretation is always a personal experience and thus is affected, to a greater or lesser extent, by personal opinion.

Therefore, humility and reverent submission to God and his Word should saturate our whole beings as we study and endeavour to preserve God's written and authoritative revelation for the generations to come. We must assume an attitude that desires to learn the art of listening to the text. This is one reason it is advisable to read a book of the Bible in one sitting. Such an approach brings the reader into the world of the narrative as it unfolds before his/her eyes. Actually, all of our study aids—Bible dictionaries, concordances, encyclopedias, lexicons, et cetera, must not become substitutes for the Bible. The Bible is a unified authoritative narrative which offers us knowledge of God and his will. Bible scholars, teachers, and preachers need to help people to enter into the world of the

⁴ Guthrie, "Biblical Authority," 16.

text. Those who are in positions of teaching God's Word have the awesome task of bringing the listeners into a real contact with the voice of God.

Indeed, Barr's view of biblical inspiration is nevertheless significant because it helps us to focus on the need for a theology that is by no means static. We believe evangelical Christianity and scholarship must engage in constant self-criticism in the light of ongoing theological trends. There has to be a regular serious diagnosis of what we believe while "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander," (I Peter 3:15-6) even though in the final analysis we must beg to differ. Evangelical theology is a symbolization of our probity, for it emerges from our most fundamental conviction that there is only one God, and that he is the God of Scripture and of nature, of theology, of the past, the present, and the future. We believe that the Christian faith is a divine revelation from God not a human speculation about God. Above all, we affirm that one day, this God will wind up all history. He has spoken, and it "stands written" in the Bible. We cannot understand fully God's revelation from this side of eternity. In the meantime, we must always study carefully the Scriptures with open minds, being self-critical of our own methodology while establishing a biblical theology. There is always room for improving our understanding of God's revelation. Indeed, the Scriptures are inexhaustible.

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