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@H is not a reference to a record of what people thought about God. 1,`B<,LFJ@H means 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

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[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

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[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

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[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.