A THEOLOGICAL REASSESSMENT AND REFORMULATION ON
THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY
IN LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS
WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION GIVEN TO
ARTICLES I, IV, X, AND XVI

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Introduction

It was not until the 17th century that the doctrine of inerrancy—a matter considered by

many to be an "essential element to the authority of Scripture and a necessary ingredient for the

health of the Church of Christ"[1]—saw any significant opposition among those who claimed the

Christian faith.[2] Beginning in the mid-20th century, however, critique of the doctrine began to

find expression among professing evangelicals.[3] Indeed, in 1978, while debate among

evangelicals over the doctrine of inerrancy was reaching its peak, prefatory comments

introducing the latest issue of *The Christian Century* even predicted the encroaching demise of

inerrancy: "Evangelical waters are being stirred up by what may be the death throes of the

'inerrancy' doctrine—the idea that the Bible contains no errors of any kind."[4] The periodical

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[1]Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), ix.

[2]"The first significant challenge to this belief [that the Bible is without error] did not arise until the seventeenth century." Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 99.

[3]See for example, Dewey Beegle, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963); Dewey Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); Jack Rogers, ed., *Biblical Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1977). Consider also the controversy over inerrancy during the 1960s at Fuller Seminary, documented in George Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

[4]James M. Wall, ed., "In this Issue," *The Christian Century*, 10 November 1976, 970.

also suggested the doctrine's usefulness and rational basis were in danger of being undone by one of its most resolute advocates, Harold Lindsell.[5]

These initial critiques and the growing controversy over the doctrine of inerrancy precipitated the organization of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter, ICBI)—a group of evangelical pastors and scholars whose stated purpose was to "define, defend, and apply the doctrine of biblical inerrancy . . . in an attempt to win the church back to this historic position."[6] The most noteworthy result of their collective effort was the creation in 1978 of The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter, CSBI): a nearly eighteen hundred-word document providing a nuanced definition of the historic doctrine.[7] Far from succumbing to any imagined "death throes," the doctrine of inerrancy would gain renewed stability as the CSBI served as an evangelical standard, providing what J.I. Packer would later designate as a solid "reference point" for future discussions on inerrancy.[8]

Packer's prediction of the CSBI's enduring usefulness, however, would find only partial fulfillment. While subsequent works of evangelical scholarship and popular writings would engage, promote, and employ the CSBI for their discussions on inerrancy, the document's influence would eventually wane. Recent evidence of the CSBI's declining influence within evangelicalism is seen primarily in two ways: 1) by the growing number of confessing evangelicals who are openly challenging the doctrine of inerrancy generally or the CSBI

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[5]Ibid., 970. The reference here is to Lindsell's book *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

[6]Geisler, *Inerrancy*, ix.

[7]This word count includes the preface, short statements, and the articles of affirmation and denial. It does not include the document's accompanying exposition, which provides an additional three thousand words to the total word count. R. A. Peterson catalogs the whole document under this longer word count. See "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 226-227.

[8]J. I. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (Westchester: Cornerstone, 1980), 47.

specifically;[9] and 2) by this current generation's lack of familiarity with the CSBI.[10]

Nevertheless, some effort has been exerted recently to reclaim the CSBI as an evangelical benchmark for the doctrine of inerrancy. The Evangelical Theological Society (hereafter, ETS) has sought to reinstate the CSBI among the Society's constituents and the greater evangelical community. In 2006, the presiding officers of ETS moved to adopt the CSBI into the Society's bylaws.[11] Most recently, Norman Geisler—a founding member of the ICBI—has attempted to recover the CSBI as evangelicalism's standard definition of inerrancy. In his work, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (2012),[12]

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[9]Some confessing evangelicals still find statements in the CSBI that reflect "untenable theological positions" while others wonder if a twelve-page definition of the word "inerrancy" (as found in the CSBI), does not "empt[y] the word of its content." See John J. Brogan, "Can I have Your Autograph? Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture," in *Evangelicals and Scripture* eds. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Migeulez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 101-102; and A.T.B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 106, respectively. Craig Allert, in his work on issues of New Testament canon and biblical authority, suggests that portions of the CSBI tend to deny "that a critical examination of the phenomena of Scripture can inform a doctrine of Scripture," while decrying the statement's narrow definition of inerrancy—a constriction that inevitably requires too many qualifications. See Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 160-161. See also Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012); Kenton Sparks, *God's Words in Human Words*: *An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Carlos Bovell, *Inerrancy and the Spiritual Formation of Younger Evangelicals* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007) and *Rehabilitating Inerrancy in a Culture of Fear* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

[10]This lack of acquaintance with the CSBI was highlighted as recently as 2004 when the Evangelical Theological Society at its 56th Annual Meeting formally referred to the document in order to clarify the society's doctrinal basis ("The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs"). Jason S. Sexton reports, "A disturbing feature at the meeting was how few were familiar with the Chicago Statement. This was so stark that members of the Executive Committee were prompted to print copies of it for every attending member." See Jason S. Sexton, "How Far Beyond Chicago: Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate," *Themelios* 34.1 (2009): 26n2.

[11]James A. Borland, "Reports Relating to the 58th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50 (2007): 215. ETS has also recently highlighted the worth of the CSBI in other ways. For example, in his presidential address to the members of ETS in 2000, Wayne Grudem set the CSBI alongside the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325 and 381), the Chalcedonian Creed (A.D. 451), and Martin Luther's 95 Theses (A.D. 1517) as evidence of the Lord's continued doctrinal purification of his Church. See "Do We Act As If We Really Believe That "The Bible Alone, and the Bible in its Entirety, is the Word of God Written?" *JETS* 43 (2000), 13.

[12]Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

Geisler argues for the adequacy of the CSBI by defending its various affirmations and denials in theological and philosophical detail, concluding that the document is in no need of revision or amendment. One wonders, however, if Geisler's conclusion cannot be challenged given the recent developments among evangelicals over inerrancy. Has there been no positive advance in the doctrine of Scripture since 1978 that may help strengthen the CSBI for future theological and edificatory use?[13] It is my contention that evangelical discussion over inerrancy would benefit from added nuance to the CSBI.[14]

A Word about Method

Although I am proposing revisions to the CSBI, I am approaching this reassessment and reevaluation from the perspective that the document is a historically faithful, carefully nuanced articulation of inerrancy. Accordingly, this paper is not an attempt to undermine the doctrine of inerrancy or the CSBI; rather, it is an attempt to strengthen the document by proposing modifications that address important contemporary developments in our doctrine of Scripture.

The CSBI itself consists of a preface, five summary statements, and the articles of affirmation and denial. The accompanying exposition consists of approximately two thousand words and provides the broader theological framework within which to rightly understand and articulate the CSBI. For the sake of concision and space, however, this paper will focus chiefly

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[13]Even those who had a hand in writing the CSBI in 1978 recognized the limitations inherent in formulating such a statement within a matter of a few days and therefore did not desire to attribute creedal status to the document. The preface of the CSBI reads, "We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight." Furthermore, the last paragraph of the preface invites a response from any who find reason to "amend its affirmations about Scripture in light of Scripture itself," while expressing thankfulness for help that might be provided in strengthening the document. Indeed, this kind of reexamination appears to be what Carl F. H. Henry had in mind when he provided the CSBI in the fourth volume of *God, Revelation and Authority* and noted in comments earlier in the book that the document was "subject to future revision." See *God who Speaks and Shows,* vol. 4 of *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 141.

[14]I am not alone here. Greg Beale suggests that some minor changes in the exposition would be helpful. See *Erosion of Inerrancy: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 267n1. While noting their usefulness, Robert Yarbrough also admits that both Chicago Statements (Inerrancy and Hermeneutics) are "a generation old and bear revisiting and rephrasing today." See "The Embattled Bible: Four More Books" in *Themelios* 34.1 (2009), 23.

on the CSBI's articles of affirmation and denial, specifically Articles I, IV, X, and XVI.[15] This approach is preferable for the following two reasons. First, the preface, short statements, and exposition depend, in large measure, upon the articles of affirmation and denial for their content. That is, because the purpose of the preface is to introduce the articles of affirmation and denial, the object of the short statements is to summarize the content of the articles, and the aim of the exposition is to place the articles in their appropriate biblical-theological[16] and historical-theological[17] framework, it is clear that the articles are what serve as the primary articulation of inerrancy. An effort to reformulate the CSBI requires, therefore, concentration on the articles of affirmation and denial.

Second, it will become clear in the following pages that the articles of affirmation and denial are intended to address important theological categories related to the doctrine of inerrancy. The breadth of the CSBI's theological coverage, therefore, requires that I relegate my efforts *only* to the articles of affirmation and denial if I am going to adequately address each category and the pertinent issues therein. I begin with Article I: The Source of Scripture's Authority.

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[15]I have adapted this paper from a larger research project in which I examine all nineteen articles of the CSBI.

[16]By "biblical-theological" I do not merely mean theology that is biblical in its affirmations. The CSBI exposition sets the doctrine of inerrancy in a framework that recognizes the unfolding storyline of Scripture and God's plan of redemption. The doctrine of Scripture—if it is to be properly evangelical—cannot be abstracted from God's purpose in history in forming a people for himself so that they might know, love, and obey him.

[17]By "historical-theological" I mean to indicate that the CSBI's exposition places the articles of affirmation and denial in their appropriate chronological setting by addressing theological issues relevant to the time it was written (1978).

Article I: The Source of
Scripture's Authority[18]

>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.

Article I was penned originally in order to mark a clear distinction between the Protestant belief in the sufficiency of Scripture and the Roman Catholic view that sees Scripture is subordinate to the judgment of the church and therefore on equal footing with other authoritative church pronouncements.[19] Article I, then, intends to emphasize that the Scriptures possess an intrinsic authority because they are God's Word and are therefore not dependent upon the church's recognition or declaration as such. The Bible's authority, consequently, reigns over *all* men. In his commentary on the CSBI, R. C. Sproul emphasizes this point when he notes that the phrase "by the church" was left out of the final draft because the framers thought it best to convey that both believers and unbelievers are obligated to receive Scripture as God's authoritative word. The inability of unbelievers to receive Scripture as God's word does not lessen their responsibility as God's creatures to do so.[20]

Despite these clear affirmations and denials, I will argue that Article I is in need of some updating. First, concerning order, I recommend that a slight reorganization of the first five

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[18]The headings given to each article are not found in the original statement. I have proposed these headings for the sake of organization and to help the reader discern the logical flow of the articles. A cursory glance at the CSBI might lead one to conclude that the placement of the articles of affirmation and denial betrays a lack of intentional arrangement. Such is not the case. R. C. Sproul, in his commentary on the CSBI, provides appropriate designations alongside each article in his table of contents (e.g. Article I: Authority; Article II: Scripture and Tradition, and so on). These designations indicate that the articles are arranged in a particular order *and* that each article is meant to touch upon an important theological category as it relates to the doctrine of inerrancy. Although I follow Sproul's general classification of the articles, I have expanded or renamed most of them, while also keeping within their original theological categorization in order to accurately reflect their content.

[19]Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 8-9.

[20]Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 8-9.

articles be considered in an effort to 1) link the authority of God's Word more clearly to the fact of revelation; and 2) present these articles in an order that better suits their content. Specifically, I suggest that Article I acknowledge revelation first then proceed to affirm that the Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative word of God. This article should also emphasize God's character in providing a written revelation. While it is clear that some contemporary evangelical opponents of inerrancy have misunderstood how accommodation has functioned historically or how it is intended to operate theologically, their emphasis on God's gracious character *in* accommodating himself to his creatures should not be overlooked.[21] In my judgment, the articles of affirmation and denial neglect to highlight God's character as it relates to the doctrine of Scripture.[22]

Second, I propose the inclusion of a reference to the self-authenticating nature of Scripture in the affirmation statement. Because both Article I and Article II both deal explicitly with the issue of authority and, implicitly, with matters of canon (our reception of the Scriptures

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[21]A mishandling of the doctrine of accommodation appears to be one of the primary problems afflicting non-inerrantist evangelicals from Jack Rogers and Donald McKim to Peter Enns and Kenton Sparks. See Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979); Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation;* Kenton Sparks, *God's Words in Human Words*. For a sound rebuttal of Rogers and McKim's work, see John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers and McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982). For a response to Enns, see G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008). For a response to Sparks's work and specifically his understanding of accommodation, see James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis A. Magary, eds., *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith: A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 19-24; 63-66; 89-92.

[22]Timothy Ward considers whether the rejection of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture has more to do with the way it is presented than in inherent intellectual barriers. "In fact it is arguable that many who have come to reject the evangelical doctrine of Scripture have done so not so much because they have just found it to be wrong biblically or intellectually incredible, but because they have found the expositions of it which they know of to be lacking in what we might call dynamic spirituality. In the writing of theology there is indeed a need for careful precision; there should also be times when the doctrine is related directly to Christian life and home lived out in relationship to God." See *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 51. Although I am not willing to attribute departure from inerrancy merely to dry, abstract, articulations of the doctrine that are unattached to real life (I believe there are other factors at play when an evangelical denies inerrancy), I do think Ward's comments are insightful. A truly evangelical doctrine of Scripture must not only provide rigorous articulation of important theological truths about the Bible; it must also communicate these truths in a way that reflects their grandeur and beauty, their relation to God, and to vital spirituality. The CSBI does this at some level in the articles and in the exposition, but greater attention could be given at this point.

as the word of God, their distinction from other human sources of theological authority, and so on), it seems fitting that there would be a clear reference to the inherent nature of Scripture's authority and how the Scripture sets itself apart from other religious documents. By including a reference to the self-authenticating nature of Scripture, we establish a stronger position from which to deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from some other source as the denial portion of Article I states and that other documents possess authority greater or equal to that of Scripture, as Article II states.[23]

Third, I recommend a reference within the affirmation statement that recognizes the nature of Scripture vis-à-vis God's relationship to humanity. Although a clear articulation of the authority of Scripture is essential for an evangelical doctrine of Scripture, there is a danger here of underemphasizing how this authority functions for the benefit of or in relation to God's creatures. Scripture's purpose does not lie merely in providing an assortment of metaphysical truths or a list commands to be obeyed. At its heart Scripture is a "book of the covenant" between God and his creatures that provides, through a rich collection of diverse literary genre, the various facets of the covenant. Indeed, the entire collection of Scripture's narratives, commands, promises, poetry, and instructions can be understood as facilitating and advancing God's purpose of creating a people for himself (Ex 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 30:22; Rev 21:3-4). Timothy Ward helpfully explains this relationship between God's purpose in redemption and the nature of Scripture.

'I will be your God and you will be my people.' This is the most straightforward form

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[23]See Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), for a strong defense of the "self-authenticating model" of New Testament canonicity. Kruger's model is multi-dimensional, based upon three components of a "proper epistemic environment" which God has provided for his people so that they might have intellectually sufficient grounds for their faith in the New Testament canon. For an excellent exposition of Scripture's self-attestation and inherent authority, see Matthew Wireman, "Scripture's Self-Attestation as the Proper Ground of Systematic Theology" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012). For more on Scripture's self-attestation, see Wayne Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture" in *Scripture and Truth*, eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992); and Sinclair Ferguson, "How does the Bible Look at Itself," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, a Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998).

in which God expresses the redemptive relationship he establishes with his people. It is a covenant relationship: a relationship established by means of a promise. Throughout the Bible 'covenant' is the most wide-ranging single description of the way God relates to humankind in his desire to redeem them. . . .Through its various unfolding manifestations in redemption history, therefore, God's covenant is a single mode of relationship, and the full significance and reality of it unfolds through time. . . .The covenant which Christ brought to fulfillment was transmitted in written form. . . .Indeed within the Old Testament the title 'book of the covenant' was ascribed to both small and larger sections of Torah material (Exod. 24:7; 2 Chr. 34:30). The messianic, redemptive events the New Testament relates fulfil [sic] that covenant which God has been establishing from the beginning. . . .In this light the New Testament constitutes the final chapters of the book of the divine covenant. The Scriptures as a whole constitute the ongoing form in which God makes his covenant promise to his people. . . .The Bible is rightly thought of as fundamentally the book of the inaugurated and fulfilled covenant.[24]

Anticipating the objection that one cannot place all of Scripture under the covenantal rubric, Ward argues that, on the contrary, "every literary genre and form within Scripture is linked directly to Scripture's basic covenantal form and function."[25]

> *Commandments* declare the stipulations of the covenant. *Prophesy* and *epistles*, in particular, expound and apply those stipulations in specific contexts; they are, in effect, the covenant preached in different situations. Narrative relates the unfolding events in which God's people have successfully trusted and rejected him, and through which God has faithfully enacted the consequences of his promises, whether in blessing or judgment. Indeed narrative takes up more space in the Bible than any other literary genre. We might guess that this is because narrative is the form of writing best suited to answering with clarity and conviction the key questions which the offer of a promises always raises: Can I trust the person making this promise? What happens when it seems as if he is failing to keep his promise? What will the consequences if I trust him, or if I don't? It is answers to these fundamental questions about the covenant that biblical narrative serves to give (see 1 Cor. 10:1-13; Heb. 4:1-13). *Psalms* give exemplary forms in which a believer can address God in many

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[24]Ward, *Words of Life*, 52-54.

[25]Ward, *Words of Life*, 55. Graeme Goldsworthy rightly notes that Scripture's unity cannot be affirmed along literary lines, for Scripture's diversity is found primarily in the fact that it includes many different kinds of literature. "The literary unity cannot be usefully reduced to the fact that all sixty six books have come to be collected under one cover. In fact there is very little by way of unity at the level of literary genres. A collection of documents written over more than a thousand years in three different languages and containing a long list of different genres and forms does not make for much that we can call unity. . . .The diversity of the canon is found principally in its literary dimension." See *Christ-Centered Hermeneutics: Biblical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVasity, 2012), 47. In order to successfully affirm the unity of Scripture, then, one's unifying principle must adequately account for and allow full voice to Scripture's diverse literary forms. Categorizing Scripture as covenant document adequately accomplishes this task.

situations in life while remaining faithfully within the covenant, whether one is full of praise for experience of blessing, or confused and despairing over God's apparent failure to keep his promises. And *apocalyptic* demonstrates graphically the full reality of the present and ultimate consequences of either blessing or cursing that follow from obedience or disobedience to the covenant."[26]

Additionally, although Ward does not mention wisdom literature explicitly, we can add that *Job* describes the suffering that may befall one with whom God has made his covenant, *Ecclesiastes* portrays the despair of attempting to find purpose and meaning outside of covenant with one's Creator, *Proverbs* provides instruction for wise and faithful living within and according to the covenant, while *Song of Songs* offers a picture how much joy and pleasure can be found in the earthly covenant of marriage.[27] Thus, Ward concludes,

> To describe Scripture as 'the book of the covenant' must therefore not be thought of as forcing a complex and rich Scripture into a one-dimensional theological mould. . . .Yet to see the Bible as 'the book of the covenant' is not simplistic or reductionistist. It is rather to recognize Scripture's profound role in the relationship between humanity and God that God wants to establish.[28]

By placing the designation of Scripture as 'the book of the covenant' within the realm of

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[26]Ward, *Words of Life*, 55.

[27]That the covenant of earthly marriage is intended to reflect and portray God's covenant with his people is a point made clear throughout Scripture (e.g. Jer. 2:2; Hosea 2:14-15; Eph. 5:21-32).

[28]Ward, *Words of Life*, 56. Drawing all of Scripture under this one category of covenant book is vital for our doctrine of Scripture this very reason: we remove the tendency to "flatten" Scripture into merely one kind of speech-act, thus allowing each genre in Scripture to have its full voice. Kevin Vanhoozer aptly comments, "What are the implications for a doctrine of Scripture of a view that sees the Bible composed of a variety of divine communicative acts? We may say, first of all, that there is no one kind of speech-act that characterizes all of Scripture. . . .Any attempt to catch up what is going on in Scripture in a synoptic judgment must be careful not to reduce the many communicative activities to a single function, be it doctrinal, narrative, or experiential." Viewing Scripture primarily as a covenant book helps us heed Vanhoozer's warning, for it allows each genre to fulfill its own unique function within the covenantal framework while Scripture's diversity and unity are thus maintained. See Kevin Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today," in *A Pathway into Holy Scripture*, eds. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 173. John Frame notes also how viewing the Bible as a covenantal document does justice to both the diversity and unity of Scripture. See *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, PA: P & R, 2010), 146. Classifying Scripture as a covenantal document does not, however, obligate one to embrace a covenantal biblical theology as such. My proposal does not depend on a particular framework vis-à-vis the biblical covenants (whether there be a covenant of works, a covenant of grace, how these each find fulfillment in the NT, and so on); it only requires that Scripture be taken as a document whose primary function is to further God's plan to form a people for himself and to come into relationship with this people (Jer 30:22; Rev 21:3-4).

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authority, authority is now understood in an appropriate framework.[29] The authority of God in Scripture is a covenantal authority—it is an authority used for the purpose of relationship.[30] Furthermore, by placing at the beginning of the CSBI a statement that references the nature of Scripture as covenant book we also locate the entire discussion of inerrancy within its proper context. Inerrancy is not an abstract concept arbitrarily applied to Scripture for the sake of apologetic advantage; it is intensely *personal* because it has to do directly with God's trustworthiness in communicating the various components of his covenant to his people. As a vitally personal (i.e. covenantal) doctrine, then, inerrancy is not to be mistaken as a claim that Scripture possesses a particular kind scientific or grammatical precision; rather, it is seen primarily as *covenantally faithful speech*.[31] Such a designation helps us articulate the doctrine of inerrancy in a way that accounts for the way Scripture presents itself. That is, as a covenant document, Scripture is written in ordinary language, accessible to the common man.[32]

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[29]I do not intend to set these two in necessary opposition to one another, but contrast the above covenantal framework for articulating biblical authority with N. T. Wright's "kingdom" framework. "Scripture's own preferred way of referring to such matters [of authority] and indeed to the saving rule of Jesus himself, is within the more dynamic concept of God's sovereignty, or *Kingdom*. It is not, that is, the kind of 'authority' which consists solely in a final court of appeal, or a commanding officer giving orders for the day. . . .This emerges clearly in the gospels, where Jesus's 'authority' consists both in healing power and in a different kind of teaching, all of which the gospel writers—and Jesus himself—understood as part of the breaking in of God's kingdom." See *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (n.c.: HarperOne, 2013), 26.

[30]See also Peter Jenson who describes the authority of Scripture according to its covenantal nature. "The covenantal people of God have the Book of the Covenant, which is coterminous with the Scriptures. The covenant origin of Scripture then reveals both the authority and the nature of Scripture. We can continue to honour [sic] its authority, while at the same time recognizing the special features that help to determine the sort of authority it possesses. Thus, on the one hand, the covenantal approach challenges the view that the Bible is merely a textbook for finding out about God. On the other hand, it challenges the view that it is nearly a witness to the word of God. Neither adequately describes the book through which God rules his covenant people." See *The Revelation of God*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 154-55. See also J. I. Packer's article, "Scripture," in *A New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair Ferguson, D. F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Leicester: IVP, 1988), 628.

[31]John Frame helpfully remarks, "This covenantal model of canonicity is enormously helpful in dealing with questions concerning biblical authority, infallibility, and inerrancy. On this model, God is the ultimate author of Scripture, and we vassals have not right to find fault with that document; rather, we are to be subject to it in all our thought and life." *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 148.

[32]See Article XIII of the CSBI where the phenomena that attends the Bible's use of ordinary language (round numbers, grammatical irregularities, and so on) does not vitiate the doctrine of inerrancy so long as inerrancy is understood to connote, mainly, the truthfulness of Scripture, rather than a kind of scientific precision.

Furthermore, while some may not find inerrancy necessary to maintain God's trustworthiness, the very nature of covenantal faithfulness appears to demand that the speaker of the covenant—God—be trustworthy in every speech act he makes.[33] What appear to be only minor errors in the text of inspired Scripture are very problematic, for every speech act is tied inextricably to other portions of the covenant document. If God speaks mistakenly in one seemingly insignificant place, how can he be trusted in other more important places?[34]

For the reasons given above, then, I recommend reframing the affirmation statement of Article I in such a way that acknowledges God's gracious character in revealing himself in self-authenticating Scripture and the covenantal nature of that revelation. The revised affirmation statement would read:

> We affirm that God has graciously revealed himself in the self-authenticating
> Scriptures. The Bible, therefore, is to be received God's covenantal, authoritative

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Commenting on the adequacy of human language—a topic we will examine in more detail below—Vern Poythress explains the manner in which God has delivered his revelation in Scripture through the use of ordinary speech. "Positively, natural languages are adequate vehicles for human communication and for communication between God and human beings. Some of the features of that might be supposed to be imperfections are in fact positive assets. In the Bible, God uses ordinary human language rather than a technically precise jargon. He does not include all the technical, pedantic details that would interest a scholar. By doing so, he speaks clearly to ordinary people, not merely to scholars advanced technical knowledge. What God says is not exhaustive, but it is sufficient to save us and to provide a sure guide for our life." *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan*, 1987), 69-70. See also John Frame, "The Spirit and the Scriptures," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, eds. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 218. Ultimately, Scripture is "what God has said in ordinary literature to ordinary people." See Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 104.

[33]Proverbs 30:5 appears to make a connection between covenantal relationship and the detailed reliability of God's word. "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him."

[34]Evangelical errantists typically answer this objection by claiming that it is not God who makes the error but the finite and fallen human authors of Scripture who error. So, while the writers of Scripture may not always be trustworthy God always is. Whether or not one can sustain the claim that all Scripture is inspired (i.e. breathed out) by God and simultaneously hold that such speech contains error, however, is another question entirely. It is not likely that one can hold to these two premises simultaneously without some modification of one or the other. See John Frame's critique of Andrew McGowan's *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture* in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 547. Packer aptly highlights the necessity of trustworthy covenantal documents: "If documents designed to make God in Christ known to all generations are untrustworthy and thus inadequate for their purpose, God has indeed failed badly. See Packer, "Scripture," 629.

Word.[35]

The denial portion of Article I sharpens the statements in the affirmation section by noting Scripture's inherent authority vis-à-vis other potential sources of authority. Because Scripture is revelation from God, its authority is not contingent upon the any human source to deem it as such—even if that human source is God's people, the church.[36] The church does, however, have a key role to play in *recognizing* the authority of Scripture. That is, while God has not granted the church authority to determine what books belong in the canon of Scripture, he has, by his Spirit and through the means of a "proper epistemic environment,"[37] given her the *ability* to identify which documents are revelation from God. Indeed, such recognition by the Church of which documents were truly inspired by God is what led to the establishment of the canon.[38]

The ability to recognize authoritative Scripture, however, does not imply that there is an authority that lies outside the text itself that somehow enables the church to draw conclusions about the nature of Scripture. This fact is implicit in the designation of Scripture as self-authenticating as we noted above. The late Stanley Grenz and John Franke, however, contend that our ability to recognize Scripture's authority is not grounded in the self-attesting text itself, but in the Spirit who has decided to speak through the text of Scripture.

> The Protestant principle [of biblical authority] means the Bible is authoritative in that it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks. Taking the idea a step further, the authority of the Bible is in the end the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is. As Christians, we acknowledge the Bible as scripture in that the sovereign Spirit has bound authoritative, divine speaking to this text. We believe that the Spirit has

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[35]The CSBI's exposition helpfully highlights the covenantal nature of Scripture, but I believe it wise to draw this emphasis into the articles of affirmation and denials alongside those articles that speak specifically to the authority of Scripture. It is especially fitting that the introductory article (Article I) would set the tone of the remaining articles by designating Scripture as God's covenantal word.

[36]Concerning this point, J. I. Packer notes concisely, "The Church has always known, more or less clearly, that it did not create a canon by discretionary fiat but received the canon that God created for it." See Packer, "Scripture," 628.

[37]Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 290.

[38]That God has given his people the ability to discern which books are the products of divine inspiration is the underlying premise of Kruger's *Canon Revisited* mentioned above.

chosen, now chooses, and will continue to choose to speak with authority through the biblical texts.[39]

Grenz and Franke continue, arguing that church comes to identify the authority of Scripture, not because of "some purported 'pristine character of the autographs,' but because of the power of the Spirit in the documents. "The church, in short, came to confess the authority of Scripture because the early believers experienced the power and truth of the Spirit of God through these writings. They knew these documents were 'animated with the Spirit of Christ.'"[40] By formulating the relationship between Scripture, the Spirit, and the community of believers in this way, Grenz and Franke attempt to chart a course between Protestant and Catholic Scripture principles. Stephen Wellum comments,

> Thus, on the one hand, they agree with Protestant theology that the text produced the community. But, on the other hand, they also defer to the Catholic tradition by asserting that 'community preceded the production of the scriptural texts and is responsible for their content and for the identification of particular texts for inclusion in an authoritative canon to which it has chosen to make itself accountable.' In this sense, then, Scripture is a product of the community of faith that produced it. But what unifies the relationship between Scripture and community is the work of the Spirit, who 'appropriates' the biblical texts and speaks to us through it.[41]

But such a position does not go far enough precisely because it does not clearly affirm Scripture's inherent authority. Wellum continues, offering a critique of Grenz and Franke at this very point.

> They deny that Scripture has an 'inherent' authority due to its divine authorship or inspired character and thus is not a self-authenticating or self-attesting text. Instead, they view the authority of Scripture in a *dynamic* manner—the Spirit "appropriating" the text and speaking "through" it. They seem to believe that if inspiration is viewed as a past event, then this implies that God has ceased to act and has become directly

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[39]Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 65; see also 66-68.

[40]Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65-66.

[41]Stephen Wellum, "Post-conservatives, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-Doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, eds. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 178.

identical with the medium of revelation. They seem to echo Barth's concerns that God always remain only *indirectly* identical with the creaturely mediums of revelation, including Scripture, otherwise God's freedom will be compromised and human beings would be able to move from a position of epistemic dependency to one of epistemic mastery. But surely there is something strange about saying that about saying that an inspired, objective text, the product of God's mighty actions, would change the epistemic relationship between God and ourselves from that of dependence to mastery.[42]

The main problem afflicting the Grenz and Franke proposal is that, as Wellum notes, they locate the authority of Scripture outside of the text of Scripture. Although authority is now situated in God through his Spirit speaking in the Scriptures, the text itself no longer retains a self-authenticating authority. This shift of authority from Scripture to Spirit, however, does not account for what Scripture is or claims to be. "In the end," Wellum concludes, "their view does not do justice to what the Bible claims regarding itself."[43]

In light of the above discussion I recommend that the denial portion of Article I counter these attempts to reframe the doctrine of biblical authority by rejecting explicitly the notion that the Bible's authority resides anywhere but the text of Scripture. The revised denial would read (with changes in italics),

> We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the universal church, tradition, or any other human source. *We further deny that the authority of Scripture lies outside the actual text of Scripture.*

This new sentence in the denial portion now links the affirmation statement concerning Scripture's nature as a self-authenticating document: To state positively that the Scripture is self-authenticating is to imply that its authority cannot reside elsewhere, even if that "elsewhere" is God himself as opposed to the biblical text.

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[42]Wellum, "Post-conservatives," 189-90. Stephen Oldfield has recently construed the Spirit's function in enabling the Church to recognize the authority of Scripture in a way that displaces Scripture's authority away from the text itself. Oldfield, an evangelical who claims a high view of Scripture but does not prefer a Warfieldian brand of inerrancy, holds that Scripture does not possess authority apart from the contemporary work of the Spirit upon the believer. See "The Word Became Text and Dwelt Among Us? An Examination of the Doctrine of Inerrancy (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2007), 228.
[43]Wellum, "Post-conservatives," 190.

Article IV: The Adequacy of
Human Language for Divine Revelation

We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

Whereas Article III[44] clearly specifies the extent—and, to some degree, the nature—of revelation, Article IV touches on the mode of revelation. Here, the CSBI confronts directly a problem that many opponents of the doctrine of inerrancy have exploited over the past several decades: the matter of human language as an adequate vehicle for revelation in light of human finitude and fallenness.[45]

Article IV affirms that God has used language to communicate his revelation to his creatures. Furthermore, it contends that man's state of corruption and his inherent limitations as a human being do not render language insufficient to convey divine truth. Although man is sinful and thus prone to error, it does not follow that man *must* error, or that he must error every time he speaks.[46] Yet, while error is not a necessary property of existing as a human, it is true that man does have a tendency to lie and to error. God's work of inspiration, mentioned in the last sentence of Article IV, overcomes man's propensity to lie and secures a text free from error.[47]

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[44]Article III: "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 responses of men for its validity."

[45]For a thorough defense of the claim that human language is a suitable instrument for divine revelation, see J. I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 197-226.

[46]For a defense of this claim and a refutation of the notion that man must error when he speaks because he is human, see Thomas H. McCall, "Religious Epistemology, Theological Interpretation of Scripture, and Critical Biblical Scholarship," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith*, 33-54.

[47]Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 13-14.

Although helpful in answering some of the challenges related to the nature of revelation and the adequacy of human language, I contend that Article IV would benefit from some modification. First, the affirmation statement would be helped if it were worded in such a way so as to highlight God's intention in designing language specifically for the purpose of revelation. As it stands now, the affirmation statement, while acknowledging that some relationship exists between God, the creation of man in his own image, and the adequacy of human language, is neither clear nor strong enough in these matters. The original statement makes it appear as though God has chosen merely to use language to communicate; it does not indicate unambiguously that he has designed human language for the very purpose of providing a sufficient vehicle for revelation.[48] I suggest, therefore, the updated affirmation statement read as follows:

> We affirm that the God who speaks created man in his image and designed human language for the very purpose of revelation.[49]

By establishing the starting principle of God's intention in creating human language, this updated affirmation statement immediately precludes arguments that suggest human language is somehow inadequate for divine communication. In my judgment, by merely affirming that God

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[48]The introductory paragraph of the exposition implies that God designed human language for the purpose of revelation, but it does not state so explicitly. A change in Article IV would require a change in the exposition as well.

[49]I believe Genesis 1:26 provides exegetical grounds for this affirmation. In this text, God, apparently in conversation with himself ("Let us"), chooses to create man in his own image. The connection between God's speech within himself (i.e. among the members of the Trinity), the many references to God's speech in the immediate context (Gen 1:1-31) and the formation of man in his own image implies strongly that language will reside at the center of what it means for humans to exist in the image of God. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to assume that the very design of human language was modeled after intra-trinitarian communication (the capacity to speak and receive speech is a characteristic that originated with God) and intended to serve as a vehicle for God would reveal himself to his creatures. See also Ward, *Words of Life*, 34. To bolster this claim, Ward helpfully notes three biblical examples where God is said to have placed his very words into the mouth of a human agent: Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:9b-10; and Balaam in Numbers 22 (Ibid.,35). Additionally, the many instances where the God's spokesmen evoke the phrase, "Thus says the LORD," also give implicit support to the notion that human language is an adequate vehicle with which God is able to reveal himself (e.g. Ex 5:1; 7:17; 8:1; 9:1; Josh 24:2; Judg 6:8; 1 Sam 2:27; 10:18; 15:2; 2 Sam 7:5; 24:12; 1 Kings 12:24; 13:21; 20:14; 2 Kings 1:4; 2:21; 7:1; 19:6; 1 Chron 17:4; 21:11; 2 Chron 11:4; 20:15; Is 7:7; 22:15; Jer 2:2; 10:2; 19:11; 27:16; 33:12; Ezek 2:4; 11:16; 29:19; Amos 1:6; 2:6; Obadiah 1:1; Micah 2:3; Nahum 1:12; Haggai 1:2; Zech 1:3; 8:20). Similar coupling of the human messages with the divine word are found in the New Testament as well (Matt 19:4-5; John 15:4-5; Rom 9:17; 1 Thess 2:13). See also Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," 214.

used human language in order to reveal himself, the original affirmation statement is left vulnerable to the claim that God, in delivering his revelation to his creatures, simply utilized what was available to him. Accordingly, it becomes easy to suggest that the divine work of inspiration, beleaguered as it was by the inherent weakness and insufficiency of human language, ultimately faltered in securing an inerrant text. If, however, God fashioned language with revelation in mind, then it becomes far more plausible that language is a sufficient vehicle for divine communication.[50]

Furthermore, by classifying God as the "God who speaks," the relationship between God, the creation of humans in his image, and the significance of language as a vehicle for revelation is made clear. This designation of God as the "God who speaks" also challenges the notion that postmodernism has so decimated our confidence in human language that we can no longer hear God speak authoritatively.[51] Finally, these proposed updates strengthen the logical connection between the affirmation and denial portions of this particular article. The connection is seen especially when we add the word "therefore" to the denial section.

> We *therefore* deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

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[50]Contra Grenz who remarks that God's disclosure of himself through the "instrumentality of human words" is a "scandal." See *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 110. It is a scandal in light of postmodernism, yes, but certainly not a scandal as the reality of God's disclosure is considered in a larger biblical-theological framework. God designed human language, among other reasons, for the *purpose* of revelation. Kevin Vanhoozer helpfully comments, "As Christians walk through the postmodern valley of shadow of deconstruction, it is good to know that language is a God-ordained gift, a created good, a means of fellowship with God and others." See "Triune Discourse: Theological Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks (Part 2), in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, eds., Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 52. Vern Poythress notes God's sovereignty in the matter of language sufficiency. "Since he is sovereign, language offers no resistance to his purposes and cannot frustrate his desire to communicate." See "Adequacy of Language and Accommodation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible: Papers from the ICBI Summit II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 352.

[51]See D. A. Carson's *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) for a penetrating critique of postmodernism and powerful defense of the Bible's ability to speak authoritatively into our contemporary intellectual climate.

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Article X: Inerrant Autographs

> We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

> We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

Recognizing that errors have crept into copies of the autographs since their initial composition, the affirmation section of Article X asserts that inspiration pertains only to the original text. If this is so, then only to the degree that copies of Scripture faithfully reflect the original autographs can they be said to be God's Word. Thankfully, the science of textual criticism has provided us with a text that comes very close to the original, and translations that follow carefully these critical texts can provide English readers a faithful rendition of Scripture.[52]

There are, however, some discrepancies among the copies in which it is difficult to determine the original text. The denial portion tacitly acknowledges this reality while emphasizing that such discrepancies do not affect significantly any Christian doctrine. The final sentence of the denial portion rejects directly the notion that the claim to inerrancy is deemed useless or irrelevant without the existence of the original manuscripts.

This particular article also has been subject recently to much scrutiny as some evangelicals have found it unhelpful, inaccurate, or have simply rejected its claims outright.[53] A similar complaint lodged by another evangelical non-inerrantist is that the notion of an inerrant *autographa* appears to be an artificial doctrinal shelter to which inerrantists have retreated in

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[52]Under the heading "Transmission and Translation," the exposition states, "Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the *autographa*. Yet, the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true word of God is within their reach."

[53]See for example, Andrew McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007). McGowan claims that, "God did not give us an inerrant autograph, because he did not intend to do so" (124).

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order to guard the character of God in his work of inspiration. That is, appeal to the *autographa* is something into which inerrantists are "forced" given their commitment to God's perfect character and the existence of variances and errors among the extant copies of Scripture.[54] I will examine the latter criticism here.

In articulating his concern over the evangelical appeal to inerrant *autographa*, James Brogan draws specifically from the discipline of textual criticism. First, he surveys the history of the discipline, noting how even as early as the third century the existence of textual variants necessitated the discussion of these issues among Christian theologians. As the practice of textual criticism continued to develop during the Enlightenment, "Two extreme responses to the findings . . . emerged."[55] On the one hand you had those who saw the existence of the multiple variant readings as an indication that we could no longer trust the authority or reliability of Scripture. On the other hand, you had those who argued for a 'God-protected' text who claim that the original text could only be found in the *Textus Receptus*.[56] The *Textus Receptus* has supporters today, but its general reliability has been strongly challenged since the late nineteenth century.[57]

Another view similar to those who accept the *Textus Receptus* as the authoritative text

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[54]See John J. Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph? Uses and Abuses of Textual Criticism in Formulating an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture," in *Evangelicals and Inerrancy: Tradition, Authority, and Hermeneutics*, eds. Vincent Bacote, Laura Miquélez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 100. In claiming that evangelical inerrantists, in light of their theological convictions about the nature of God and the existence of variant texts, are "forced" into the position of affirming inerrant autographs, Brogan cites Greg Bahnsen. In the article in question, however, Bahnsen does not indicate or imply that evangelicals are somehow forced into their affirmation of inerrant autographs as if their theological commitments have caused them to ignore clear evidence. On the contrary, Bahnsen's recognition of the differences among the extant copies compels him to *refine* the doctrine of inerrancy *according to* the evidence. Bahnsen even chides those who have "gone to unscholarly excess in the interest of protecting the divine authority of Scripture." He lists Philo, John Owen, Hollaz, Quenstedt, and Turretin as those guilty of allowing their desire to protect the authority of God's word to overwhelm their judgment at this point. See "The Inerrancy of the Autographa," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 155

[55]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 97.

[56]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 97.

[57]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 98.

is typically referred to as the "Majority Text" view. Proponents of this particular text claim that, "the original text of the New Testament has been preserved in the text found in *the majority* of extant manuscripts."[58] Brogan explains further, noting the general weaknesses in the position.

> The overwhelming majority of the thousands of minuscule (cursive) manuscripts dating from the ninth through fifteenth centuries contain a very similar text (often referred to as the Byzantine text-type). . . . The basic weakness of the Majority Text argument is that there is little (if any) textual evidence that the Byzantine text existed before the fifth century. None of the manuscripts from the second through fourth centuries display this type of text. In summary, both the [*Textus Receptus*] and Majority Text advocates begin with the theological presupposition of the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the autographs *and then* proceed to argue for the providential preservation of that text *in one particular text or text-type*.[59]

Evangelicals who have embraced the findings of textual criticism, therefore, appear to be at an impasse: How are they able to acknowledge a corrupt text while simultaneously maintaining the doctrine of inerrancy? The answer, historically, has been to attribute inerrancy to the original texts rather than the later copies. The discipline of textual criticism has alleviated much of the trouble created by the corruption of subsequent copies by providing us with a text, as B. B. Warfield has averred, that is very close to the original.[60] From here, Brogan begins his critique of the evangelical approach to textual criticism and the doctrine of inerrancy.

Although he commends evangelicals for integrating textual criticism into their doctrine of Scripture, Brogan faults conservative theologians for misappropriating the data produced by textual criticism in order to "sustain untenable theological positions."[61] He criticizes conservative evangelicals at three specific points. First, for continuing to rely upon text-critical approaches that are out-of-date and do not take into adequate account recent findings

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[58]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 98.

[59]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 99.

[60]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 99-102.

[61]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 102.

that suggest that the New Testament text was more fluid than fixed.[62]

Secondly, Brogan chides evangelicals for misusing the discipline of textual criticism to overturn long-held text-critical methods. As an example, Brogan cites James Borland's exhortation to evangelicals to reject text-critical methods that tend to undermine the idea of inerrant autographs. Brogan claims, however, that Borland's attempt to turn his evangelical constituency to more conservative text-critical methods is merely a move to promote the Majority Text. Brogan dismisses such efforts as theologically biased and ultimately not helpful.[63]

Finally, Brogan reproves his fellow evangelicals for resorting to the claim of textual corruption in order to reconcile a difficult reading when no evidence exists for the corruption of the passage in question. Here, Brogan argues that Gleason Archer, in his attempt to refute claims from William LaSor and Dewey Beegle that certain parallel Old Testament passages (e.g. 2 Sam 10:18; 1 Chron 19:18) contained contradictory information, utilized text-critical arguments that had no actual textual warrant. [64] On the whole, Brogan finds that the evangelical approach to textual criticism and its integration into a larger doctrine of Scripture leaves more questions than it answers.

In light of these findings, Brogan states that he cannot accept the idea of "inerrant autographs" because 1) inerrancy is not a biblical word or concept ("trustworthiness" is a word with stronger historical precedent); 2) the New Testament authors extended the concept trustworthiness to the current copies of Scripture not merely the original autographs; 3) the

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[62]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 102. Brogan remarks, "Evangelicals who claim we have the exact words of the autographs in one of our current critical editions (such as UBS⁴ or NA²⁷) or, worse yet, in an uncritical text (the TR) tend to ignore the opinions of textual critics who argue in some cases *none* of our extant Greek manuscripts contain the original wording." Moreover, the very idea of an "autograph" has become more and more elusive. Brogan wonders aloud whether evangelical inerrantists might advocate even removing questionable texts like Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11 in their search for the original text.

[63]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 104-105.

[64]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 105.

inerrantists position does not take into account the entire phenomena of Scripture including the process of inspiration, transmission, and canonization; 4) inerrancy does not allow for honest inquiry into the problems posed by scholarship conducted in other areas of learning; 5) inerrancy yields little to no pastoral benefit.[65] Thus, evangelicals, in formulating their doctrine of Scripture, must take care to explain the Bible's divine origin while also integrating all the various phenomena of Scripture. Problems posed by textual critical studies should not trouble us, however, for "God is able to communicate through, and despite of, the frailities of human spoken and written language."[66]

While inerrantists can be thankful to Brogan for the exhortation to handle the discipline of textual criticism with greater care and integrity, they must also form their own critiques of his position. I will now examine a few missteps in Brogan's argument. First, Brogan never actually overturns the idea of inerrant autographs. One of Brogan's complaints with inerrantists is that they have mishandled the discipline of textual criticism and skewed specific data to fit their own theological assumptions. While Brogan's contention here may be true at some level, it does not in and of itself disprove the doctrine of inerrant autographs. The claim of an inerrant *autographa* is simple enough: inspiration and inerrancy only apply to the time when the Scripture was originally penned.[67] The use and misuse of textual criticism by particular evangelicals as they seek to establish the original text, however, is not tied essentially

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[65]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 107-109.

[66]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 110.

[67]The question of what constitutes the *autographa*, nevertheless, may require some rethinking by evangelicals committed to the doctrine of inerrancy. For example, concerning specifically the inspiration of the Old Testament, Michael Grisanti proposes that we understand inspiration under the larger heading of inscripturation. Inscripturation is the process whereby God's people commit his word to written documents and draw these documents into their final canonical form. We should view the process of inspiration, however, as an activity that lasts during the entire event of inscripturation. For the Old Testament specifically, we would mark this period from the time Moses first penned Genesis to the time the Old Testament canon was finally closed. Inspiration, therefore, would be applied to those who added to and organized the Old Testament books. Yet, at every point during the inscripturation process, God's word is fully inspired, trustworthy, and wholly without error. See "Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture," in *JETS* 44 (2001): 577-98.

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to the doctrine of inerrant *autographa*. That is, one can still contend for inerrant autographs while acknowledging that some evangelicals have misused textual criticism in their attempt to restore those original autographs. We may not have an absolutely fixed final form of the entire text, and we can grant that our work in the discipline of textual criticism is ongoing, but this is *not* the same as saying there was never an original form of the text or that this form was not inerrant.

One of the main problems here is that Brogan appears to have misunderstood the relationship between inerrancy and the recovery of the *autographa*. If he is suspicious of the doctrine of inerrancy on the basis of the claim that we are unable to recover the autographs, it may be because he has overlooked an important matter: the recovery of the original text is first an issue pertaining to the doctrine of inspiration and then to inerrancy. "Inspiration relates to the *wording* of the Bible," Daniel Wallace notes, "while inerrancy relates to the *truth* of a statement."[68] Wallace helpfully illustrates this point.

> If I say, 'I am married and have four sons, two dogs, and a cat,' that is an inerrant statement. It is not inspired, nor at all related to Scripture, but it is true. Similarly, whether Paul says, 'we have peace' or 'let us have peace' in Rom 5:1, both statements are true (though each in a different sense), though only one is inspired.[69]

The goal of textual criticism is to get to that originally inspired text. Wallace continues, providing two reasons for why a position like Brogan's is problematic.

> Regardless of what one thinks about the doctrine of inerrancy, the argument against it on the basis of the unknown autographs is logically fallacious. This is so for two reasons. First, we have the text of the NT *somewhere* in the manuscripts. There is no need for conjecture, except perhaps in one or two places. Second, the text we have in any viable variants is no more a problem for inerrancy than other problems where the text is secure. Now, to be sure, there are some challenges in the textual variants to inerrancy. This is not denied. But there are simply bigger fish to fry when it comes to issues inerrancy faces. Thus, if conjectural emendation is unnecessary, and if no viable variant registers much of a blip on the radar called 'problems for inerrancy,'

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[68]Daniel Wallace, "The Gospel According to Bart: A Review Article of *Misquoting Jesus* by Bart Ehrman," in *JETS* 49 (2006), 334.

[69]Wallace, "The Gospel According to Bart," 334.

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then not having the originals is a moot point for this doctrine. It is not a moot point for verbal inspiration, of course, but it is for inerrancy.[70]

By dismissing inerrancy in light of the claim that we do not have the original autographs, Brogan fails to acknowledge that we do in fact have much of the original text, as Wallace contends, somewhere in the manuscripts, and that the less reliable sections pose no greater threat to inerrancy than the more reliable ones. In other words, inerrancy as a doctrine is not dependent so much on whether we can recover the autographical text as much as it is contingent upon whether or not God inspired an error-free autograph in the first place.[71]

Second, in the body of his main critique, Brogan appears to attribute the faulty text-critical positions of some evangelicals to all inerrantists. He rightly criticizes the claim that God preserved his word exclusively in a particular textual tradition like the *Textus Receptus* or the Majority Text.[72] But it does not follow necessarily from this critique that inerrantists cannot hold to an inerrant autographical text while also rejecting the arguments of TR and MT proponents. For example, John Frame, an apt defender of the doctrine of inerrancy, recognizes the weaknesses of such arguments while also affirming God's preservation of the original text.[73]

To be fair, Brogan acknowledges that some evangelicals have departed from the TR and the MT to argue that the texts found in UBS[4] and the NA[27] are nearly identical to the original *autographa*. Yet, he finds even this position unsatisfactory. Why? He hints at an answer: "Considered all together, evangelicals put together a nice, neat package. Unfortunately, those who hold these views do not consider *all* of the implications of textual criticism and, as a textual

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[70]Wallace, "The Gospel According to Bart," 334.

[71]As I will note below, inerrancy *does* compel our studious search for the original text. Jason Sexton offers a defense for why inerrancy should be a *prerequisite* for those who seek to establish the original text. See "NT Text Criticism and Inerrancy," in *TMSJ* 17 (Spring 2006), 51-59.

[72]Daniel Wallace, for example, has summarily criticized the view that God has preserved his word *only* in the TR or the MT. See "The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods, and Critique," in *JETS* 37 (1994): 185-215.

[73]Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 247n9.

critic, I feel their solutions raise more questions than they answer."[74] One can assume, based on

his previous critiques, that by "*all* of the implications of textual criticism" he means those that

suggest that 1) recovery of an autographical text is nearly impossible; 2) the New Testament text

was far more fluid in the first and second century than previously believed; or 3) there are

irreconcilable errors in the original text. I will examine issues related to number three below.

Here I will note that his hesitations in one and two do reflect the current shift in textual criticism

pertaining to the discipline's chief objectives. That is, it makes sense that Brogan would have a

difficult time accepting the inerrantist text-critical proposals because the focus of his discipline

as a whole over the past thirty years has moved from recovery of an original text to investigating

the historical significance of the variants. Daniel Wallace explains,

> Until the 1990s, there was little question that the primary objective of NT textual criticism was to examine the copies of the NT for the purpose of determining the exact wording of the original. In 1993, Bart Ehrman's provocative book *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* appeared. [By the statement of his methodology] Ehrman . . . shifts the goal of textual criticism slightly: no longer his concern for the original words of the text as much as it with seeing the corruptions of the text in early transmissional history. Although this is not a denial of the prime objective, it is giving it considerably less weight than other textual critics had previously done.[75]

In his presidential address to the Southeastern regional Society of Biblical Literature in 1997,

Erhman would state that, "the primary goal of textual criticism was now 'to see how the

transmission of this text came to be so thoroughly enmeshed in the concerns and conflicts of the

emerging Christian church.'"[76] David Parker, professor of theology at the University of

Birmingham and one of the leading experts in the field of textual criticism, would publish a book

that same year in which he would advocate for a new approach to the discipline. According to

Parker, each manuscript of the New Testament

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[74]Brogan, "Can I have Your Autograph," 106.

[75]Wallace, "Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism for the Twenty-First Century," in *JETS* 52 (2009), 80.

[76]Wallace, "Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism," 81.

tells a story, and it is the task of the textual critic to find out what that story is. It does not matter that the MSS differ from each other, because the objective is no longer to get back to the original text. The objective is to learn what we can about the social milieu and theological tensions that early Christians faced. In other words, Parker is assuming that the quest for the autographic text is virtually irrelevant and that the goal of textual criticism should be to focus on the rich heritage of textual variants that the scribes have bequeathed to us.[77]

So, if the recovery of the original text is no longer the overriding purpose of textual criticism, then Brogan's concerns may have some merit: why uphold inerrancy if we are unable to determine the original text? Some evangelicals, however, are not so ready to jettison the establishment of the original text as the principal goal of textual criticism. Wallace quotes Moises Silva who, while acknowledging the worth of text-critical goals that go beyond the recovery of the original text, still maintains that such retrieval is not only of primary importance, but even provides the framework for these other aims.[78] Wallace agrees: "When all is said and done, we still must affirm the following as the *primary goal* of NT textual criticism: the study of copies of the NT for the primary purpose of determining the exact wording of the autographs."[79] The kind of approach to textual criticism advocated in this new shift is ultimately self-defeating "because it has to presuppose an original text in order to blur the distinctions between it and any secondary text."[80] Wallace thus concludes, "In short, the quest for the wording of the autograph is still worth fighting for."[81]

It is difficult, however, to discern exactly where Brogan stands on this issue, for he also cites Moses Silva, who, while warning that we not turn UBS[4] or NA[27] into another *Textus Receptus*, acknowledges that the UBS reflects "a broad consensus and . . . thus provides a

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[77]Wallace, "Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism," 82.

[78]Wallace, "Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism," 84.

[79]Wallace, "Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism," 85. Wallace ties this shift in textual criticism to a post-modern ethos that has crept into the discipline of textual criticism just as it has in virtually all areas of learning.

[80]Wallace, "Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism," 85.

[81]Wallace, "Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism," 85.

convenient starting point for further work."[82] Point taken: Because the inerrantist position does not depend necessarily on a theology of preservation that requires God's sovereign protection of one particular textual tradition, evangelicals can affirm an inerrant *autographa* while also fully acknowledging errors in subsequent copies, the existence of multiple manuscripts and subsequent textual variants, and the ongoing need to improve our current text. Why must this present a problem for the doctrine of inerrant *autographa*?

Generally speaking, it appears that Brogan has a bias against inerrancy that will not allow him to embrace the text-critical conclusions of any inerrantist. Although he builds his critique around the discipline of textual criticism, he cannot help but reflect theological assumptions himself; something of which he accuses inerrantists throughout his article. In the end, he even resorts to *theological and philosophical categories* to complete his critique. For example, in the final section of his article, Brogan states that he rejects inerrancy because it is neither a biblical concept nor a teaching with historical precedent. He prefers "trustworthiness," claiming the church fathers as his reference point. [83] He dislikes the inerrantist view because, in his judgment, it does not take into account the whole process of inscripturation: inspiration, redaction, canonization, transmission, and translation. But certainly he cannot mean that evangelical theologians have failed produced literature that interacts with these issues from an

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[82]Wallace, "Challenges," 85. Brogan is quoting Moses Silva, "Modern Critical Editions and Apparatuses of the Greek New Testament," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, ed. Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 283-96 and 290-91.

[83]Here he cites Greg Bahnsen's article, "The Inerrancy of the Autographa," rejecting Bahnsen's claim that the authors of Scripture, in their use of the Old Testament, made a distinction between extant copies and the autographsBrogan, however, does not explain why he does not accept Bahnsen's argument, only that he finds it "completely unconvincing," presumably because "[Bahnsen] allows his theological presuppositions to dictate the outcome of his findings rather than opening his views to be challenged and perhaps changed by the evidence at hand (107)."[83] Brogan states further that Bahnsen "fails to recognize that his distinctions between autograph are purely modern constructs (107)."[83] But these are assertions, not arguments. And, if one refuses to engage an opponent at the level of his allegedly flawed presuppositions while also neglecting to interact with any of the evidence presented, then one will only be guilty of begging the question himself. In my judgment, Bahnsen's argument for the biblical author's distinction between copy and autograph is sound and grounded squarely *on the biblical text*. Brogan does not attempt to interact at any level with Bahnsen's arguments or evidence.

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inerrantist perspective.[84] Nevertheless, Brogan follows his complaint with a question:

> How do we explain that except for a small handful of people who were permitted to read possibly one of the autographs, everyone has heard and responded to God through reading or hearing "errant" copies of the biblical text, including the translations based on the 'scandalously corrupt' Greek text used by most evangelicals today?

Here Brogan appears to accuse inerrantists of promoting a view of Scripture that requires the transmission of error-free copies in order to preserve the gospel and promote salvation. Again, this may be the argument of some inerrantists, but this is certainly not the view of all inerrantists. Evangelical theologians can gladly acknowledge that God has been pleased to save a multitude of sinners over the centuries with copies of Scripture that were far from perfect. The doctrine of inerrant *autographa* does not necessarily imply that inerrant copies are required in order for someone to repent and believe the gospel. Yet, neither does God's grace in saving people with less-than-perfect copies alleviate our responsibility to continually work for a better, more faithful text.

Brogan also complains that inerrancy does not allow "honest inquiry into the historical or scientific details within the biblical record or the complex history of the Bible's composition, transmission, and canonization."[85] By claiming that the Bible is without error in every detail, one is forced to "explain away *every* challenge that is made about the Bible's accuracy."[86] Well-founded scientific, archeological, and historical arguments or hypothesis must be ignored; the discoveries of source, form, and redaction criticism disregarded; internal discrepancies in the text

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[84]To mention a few: *Scripture and Truth*, eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); *Evangelicals and Inerrancy*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1984); *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, eds. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1988); Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: Moody, 1986); Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Michael Gristanti, "Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon."

[85]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 108.

[86]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 108.

of Scripture overlooked. "The possibility that there be 'mistakes' in the way information is presented or inaccuracies in details or discrepancies between accounts," Brogan protests, "is not even an option open to an inerrantist." Brogan continues, accusing inerrantists of "forc[ing] the biblical authors to comply with modern standards of history and science concerning 'truth' and 'error,' although these categories are completely foreign to the culture and contextual worlds of the biblical authors."[87]

While Brogan's generalizations in all three statements fail to take into account the work done in these areas by evangelical scholars laboring from an inerrantist perspective—it is simply unfair to imply that on the whole evangelical inerrantists 'ignore' or 'explain away' problems produced by historical-critical studies or science[88]—it must be noted that Brogan has now subtly moved his critique out of the realm of textual criticism into epistemology. He is no longer operating from a standpoint where he is questioning the claim of inerrantists concerning the accuracy of our current copies of Scripture; he is claiming that inerrancy as a doctrine per se is unfeasible because it disallows critical scholarship, rejects the assimilation of discoveries in other areas of learning, and thrusts a theory of truth upon Scripture that is alien to the biblical authors and their cultural setting. But with these concerns we are now reaching beyond the discipline of textual criticism and appealing to matters related to knowledge theory and how we structure the interface between biblical affirmations and historical research.

Furthermore, while it is true that some inerrantists have, by their method and rhetoric, sealed off Scripture from critical and open-minded investigation into important historical matters, it is difficult to lay this fault at the feet of inerrancy. Theoretically speaking, if the Bible is wholly true and does not contain error in any category, then critical study of the Bible and reflection upon how other areas of learning relate to the truth of Scripture should flourish, not

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[87]Brogan, "Can I Have Your Autograph," 108.

[88]Unless, of course, you are committed to the position that the Bible does contain errors. If this is your position, then no matter how rigorous the treatment, you will never be satisfied that it was thorough or honest enough until it admits to errors in the text of Scripture.

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wane. With regard to Brogan's claim that inerrancy foists a foreign epistemology upon the Bible

writers, Beale, for example, rightly observes that this kind of dichotomy posed between ancient

and contemporary standards of truth is generally false.[89] I bring up Borland's couched appeal to

epistemology here only to demonstrate that there is more aggravating his general discomfort with

inerrancy than what textual criticism affords.[90]

I have spent significant space in my critique of Brogan, not to belabor my criticism of

his position, but to help illuminate where the debate has been and where it is currently with

regard to the matters of textual criticism and the inerrancy of the Bible. While I am not

convinced of Brogan's argument, I do think he highlights ways in which the CSBI might be

strengthened in the manner it addresses textual criticism and the inerrancy of the autographs.

An updated CSBI, therefore, should acknowledge the changing shape of textual

criticism and assert directly the possibility of recovering the original text. Care should be taken,

however, to root inerrancy in God and in Scripture rather than in the discipline of textual

criticism. One of the mistakes made by other evangelicals zealous for absolute certainty in the

recovery of the original text, is to—wittingly or unwittingly—ground the doctrine of inerrancy in

the discipline of textual criticism. When this doctrinal misplacement occurs, inerrancy becomes

dependent upon the errorless recovery of the original text. Therefore, I recommend the

modification of Article X that acknowledges the state of current text-critical scholarship and the

addition of another article that clearly distinguishes the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy

from the doctrine of preservation and the discipline of textual criticism.

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[89]For example, see Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy*, 42-44.

[90]Indeed, I wonder if Brogan draws some influence from Barth in his understanding of Scripture as the Word of God. In the last paragraph of his article, Brogan states, "God is able to communicate through, and despite of, the frailties of human spoken and written language. God communicated to the original authors through the Holy Spirit and he continues to communicate to us today through the Holy Spirit by means of that written record" (110-111). Cf. Barth in the *Church Dogmatics*: "If God was not ashamed of the fallibility of all the human words of the Bible, of their historical and scientific accuracies, their theological contradictions, the uncertainty of their tradition, and, above, all, their Judaism, but adopted and made use of these expressions in all their fallibility, we do not need to be ashamed when he wills to renew it to us in all its fallibility as witness, and it is mere self-will and disobedience to try to find some infallible elements in the Bible" (*CD* I/2, p. 531).

Regarding Article X, I suggest only the denial portion undergo any changes. The affirmation statement carefully places inspiration in the original autographs, while also avoiding two potential pitfalls: 1) the suggestion that recovery of the original text is dependent upon the preservation of one text type; and 2) the implication that the original text can be recovered with absolute certainty. Concerning the second pitfall, the statement affirms the general reliability of our current text-critical work by using the phrase "great accuracy," but it also eludes the indefensible position of utter epistemological certainty as it pertains to recovery of the original text.[91]

The updated denial portion of Article X would answer the matter of recent developments in the area of textual criticism, while also retaining the original denial that the absence of the autographs injures any major element of the Christian faith. I do, however, recommend the excision of the last sentence of the denial section due to its redundancy. The reworded affirmation statement, the addition to the denial portion, and the proposed additional article (see below) all demonstrate the relevance of the doctrine of inerrant autographs and provide ample reason for why the absence of the *autographa* does not render such affirmations invalid. The updated denial portion of Article X, then, would read as follows (with changes in italics):

> *We deny that recent manuscript discoveries or other developments in the discipline of textual criticism hinder rather than strengthen the possibility of determining an original text.* We further deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs.

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[91]See Wallace, "Challenges," 86, where he helpfully comments concerning the matter of textual criticism and epistemological certainty. "Can we know with absolute certainty that what we have in our hands today exactly replicates the original text? Of course not. We can never have absolute certainty about any historical documents whose originals have vanished. And postmodernism is a corrective to the naïve epistemological triumphalism of the evangelical community. So, if we do not have absolute certainty about the wording of the original, what do we have? We have overwhelming probability that the wording in our printed Bibles is pretty close."

**Additional Article: The Usefulness
of the Existing Copies**

The addition of another article to the document would bolster these affirmations and

denials by 1) acknowledging the need for ongoing work in the discipline of textual criticism; and

2) denying the claim that the doctrine of inerrancy requires a perfect reconstruction of the

original autographs. Both statements taken together under this new article would help further

detach the doctrine of inerrancy from dependency upon the discipline of textual criticism. The

additional article would read:

> We affirm that the work of textual criticism is ongoing as we continually seek to
> improve our current text for the benefit of the church.

> We deny that the transmission of perfect copies is required to affirm the inerrancy of
> the autographs, or that an error-free rendition of the autograph is necessary for one to
> respond in faith to the gospel. We further deny that the doctrine of inerrancy requires
> rather than motivates our recovery of the autographical text.

**Article XVI: The History of the
Doctrine of Inerrancy**

> We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith
> throughout its history.

> We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a
> reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

Both before and after the CSBI was penned, one of the primary strategies utilized by non-

inerrantists to undermine the inerrantist position was to make an appeal to the historic teaching

of the church. The early church fathers, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Bavink, and

Kuyper, they claimed, all held to a view of Scripture that was far different than what inerrantists

advance today.[92] Furthermore, not only was inerrancy a departure from the historic position of

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[92]The most famous work that sought to undermine the historical precedence of the doctrine of inerrancy
was Jack Rogers and Donald McKim's tome, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*. Despite John
Woodbridge's thorough rebuttal of this interpretation of history in *Biblical Authority*, some continue to appeal to
history in order to overturn inerrancy as a novel doctrine. See Woodbridge's most recent work on the history of
inerrancy in "Evangelical Self-Identity and the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Understanding the Times: New
Testament Studies in the 21st Century* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 104-138.

the church, it is a doctrine that owed its origin to a specific era of church history in which the Protestant response to the assaults of higher criticism compelled scholars to form a theology of Scripture according to modernistic rather than biblical categories. The result was a doctrine that established Scripture as epistemological first principle and therefore required an error-free text in order to retain its appropriate authority for Christians.

While the argument for inerrancy does not finally rest upon historical precedent, it was necessary for inerrantists to refute the kind of historiography described above and bind their argument to the teaching of the church.[93] The affirmation section makes a positive claim—the doctrine of inerrancy has strong historical precedent—while the denial portion makes a parallel assertion, rejecting the idea that inerrancy is a recent doctrine concocted and crystallized during a time of rigorous debate in the seventeenth century over the reliability of the Bible and the findings of historical-critical scholarship.

Although the words *inerrant* or *inerrancy* were never used prior to the modern period, the idea of an error-free text was certainly embraced by a large segment of the professing Christian church since the first century. A question that naturally emerges as one considers the rigor with which the doctrine of inerrancy was defended and defined in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, however, is why so much attention was given to the doctrine in the latter half of the second millennium. Such a recent upsurge in scholarship devoted to the doctrine of Scripture generally and to inerrancy specifically does seem to give some weight to the claim that the idea of an error-free text—at least as it is currently defined—is a modern invention.

Additional Article:
Inerrancy and the Validity of
Doctrinal Development

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[93]For example, see Harold Lindsell, "An Historian Looks at Inerrancy (1965)," in *Evangelicals and Inerrancy*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984); John D. Hannah, ed. *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*.

It is at this point that I suggest the CSBI could be strengthened. Perhaps not by modifying the existing article, but by including an additional article that asserts the legitimacy of doctrinal development and acknowledges the contemporary articulation of inerrancy as a detailed yet valid expression of the historic teaching of the church.[94] The new article would read,

> We affirm that our theological formulations naturally receive greater nuance as we engage contemporary issues. We further affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is a nuanced yet valid expression of the church's historic position on the nature of Scripture.

> We deny that inerrancy rightly articulated is the misguided product of modernism, common-sense realism, or any other external framework applied to Scripture rather than the teaching of Scripture itself.

This new article is vital for it introduces a category the original CSBI neglected to include. Article XVI simply denies that inerrancy is a novel doctrine, crafted relatively recently in church history. This is helpful and necessary, but it appears as a mere reaction unless it is set alongside a statement that legitimizes the idea that Christian doctrine, over time and as a result of encountering contemporary issues, grows and matures in nuance and detail. As doctrines develop, however, they continue to retain fundamental aspects of the original teaching, as a child retains the features that were faintly apparent in his prenatal state. Inerrancy, I am claiming, is not a doctrinal invention conceived by Christian apologists in order to retain intellectual credibility in the throes of modernism or to counter the arguments of higher-criticism; it is an example of what happens when a doctrine is confronted contemporary issues related directly to what the doctrine originally asserted.[95] As already noted, it was not until the latter half of the

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[94]James Buchanan, writing on the doctrine of justification, expresses well the nature of doctrinal development. "It is not necessary to say in reply to [the claim that justification is trite and exhausted], as some might be disposed to say, that 'what is new in Theology is not true, and what is true is not new;' for we believe, and are warranted by the whole history of the Church in believing, that Theology, like every other science, is progressive—progressive, not in the sense of adding anything to the truth once for all revealed in the inspired Word, but in the way of eliciting and unfolding what was always been contained in it—of bringing out one lesson after another, and placing each of them in a clearer and stronger light—and discovering the connection, interdependency, and harmony, of all the constituent parts of the marvelous scheme of Revelation." See *Justification* (1867 reprint; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1997), 1.

[95]Contra Todd Mangum who plainly states that, "Within [the modernist-fundamentalist] debate, conservatives developed the doctrine of inerrancy to guard the Bible against attack." Such a conception of how the

millennium that the doctrine of Scripture received concentrated attention. The reason for this rather recent development is because it is only of late that epistemological, biblical, and theological developments have *necessitated* concerted interaction with issues related to the nature of Scripture. Until late in the 19th century, the view that Scripture is entirely truthful and without error in all it affirms was largely assumed by the bulk of the church so there was no need to argue strenuously for it. We should, therefore, expect a stronger and more detailed emphasis on the error-free nature of Scripture when in the 19th century scholars presented sophisticated arguments that were undermining the truthfulness of major theological affirmations and large swaths of the biblical narrative. This new article establishes a category within which to understand both the doctrine of inerrancy and the CSBI as natural developments in the course of church history.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have proposed a few modifications to the CSBI in an effort to strengthen the document in light of contemporary developments in the doctrine of Scripture. In my reassessment and reformulation of these articles, I claimed that the current status of the evangelical discussion of the doctrine of Scripture necessitates a clear articulation of Scripture's nature as a self-authenticating text that functions chiefly as a covenant document between God and his people. As a self-authenticating text, Scripture possesses inherent authority that cannot located outside the text, even if the preferred location is in the Spirit himself.

This discussion was followed by an examination of the claim that human language is adequate for divine communication. Although I made it clear that I fully embrace the notion that human language is an adequate vehicle by which God is able to reveal himself to his creatures, I

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doctrine of inerrancy was articulated in the early twentieth century ignores important historical factors and does not give any consideration to the matter of legitimate doctrinal development.   See "The Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy, the Inerrancy of Scripture, and the Development of American Dispensationalism," in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Authority of Scripture: Historical, Biblical, and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Carlos R. Bovell (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 47-70.

suggested that a renewed article should affirm the adequacy of human language with greater force, placing the ground of this claim in God's *design* of human language for the purpose of revelation rather than his *use* of language as a vehicle for revelation.

In the following section, I dedicated several pages to exploring a contemporary challenge to inerrancy that has come from the realm of textual criticism. Here I recommended modifications to the existing article and the addition of a new article that accounts for the recent changes in the discipline of textual criticism while relating these changes specifically to the doctrine of inerrancy. Here I noted that despite the changing nature of textual criticism as a discipline, recovery of the original text is still a valid and necessary endeavor, but is not required by the doctrine of inerrancy itself or needed in order to promote saving belief in the gospel.

Finally I proposed the addition of an article that articulates the validity of doctrinal development in order to provide a category to better understand Article XVI. By appending this article to the CSBI, the claim to historical precedent is upheld in light of the significant theological developments that occurred in the 17th, 18th, and 19th century.

Although I have sought to propose modifications to the CSBI, I do not intend this paper to be the final word on how we should address these issues. Rather, my aim for this essay is to spark conversation around how we might retrieve and reframe the CSBI for future usefulness.