Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics

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The Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics is a peer-reviewed journal published annually on behalf of the International Society of Christian Apologetics to foster scholarly discussion of ideas among evangelical scholars relevant to the defense of the Christian faith. It includes articles from a wide variety fields, including philosophy, ethics, theology, biblical studies, law, literature, history, and comparative religions.

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Faith in accordance with the Doctrinal Statement of the
Society.

Contents

Is It Just a Matter of Interpretation, not of Inerrancy? Examining the Relationship between Inerrancy and Hermeneutics

Norman L. Geisler[1]

Introduction

A current argument for broadening the traditional meaning of inerrancy is: "It's Just a Matter of Interpretation, not of Inerrancy." This is used to justify the acceptance of views that have been traditionally rejected by inerrantists. For example, Jack Rogers of Fuller Seminary held that the Bible is wholly true. He even went so far as to say that he was "in agreement with the view of inerrancy set forth in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy [1978]." Yet he allowed for there to be factual mistakes in the Bible.[2] How so? Because when examining the biblical text according to his "the intention of the author," he insisted

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[1] Norman L. Geisler, Ph.D., is co-founder of Southern Evangelical Seminary and currently teaches at Veritas Evangelical Seminary.

[2] Jack Rogers, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 431-432.

that the biblical authors did not intend to mislead the reader, even when they said that some things are factually incorrect.

Likewise, Robert Gundry justified his "dehistoricizing" of sections of Matthew (e.g., the visit of the Magi) by claiming he believed in the inerrancy of the whole Bible, including that text on the Magi in Matthew 2, however, he claimed the passage was not to be interpreted literally.[3] So, he claimed this was not denying the inerrancy of Scripture since his claim about Matthew was only a matter of interpretation, not one of inspiration.

Similarly, Michael Licona claims to believe in the inerrancy of the Bible (including Matthew), even though he affirms that it would not be contrary to inerrancy to view the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27:51-54 as

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[3] See Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), Appendix.

"poetic" or a "legend"[4] claiming that in that kind of Greco-Roman genre "it is often difficult to determine where history ends and legend begins" (*RJ*, 34). Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that even a literal contradiction in the Gospel record[5] could be consistent with a belief in inerrancy, since in the kind of genre used in the Gospels allow both of these texts as true, even though they contradict each other [6]

According to this view held by Rogers, Gundry, Licona, and others, challenging the meaning of a biblical narrative (as to whether it is historical) does not call inspiration into question; but is simply a matter of

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[4] Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approac*h (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academia, 2010), 548, 553.

[5] In the transcript of the debate with Bart Ehrman (Spring, 2009) Licona said, "I think that John probably altered the day [of Jesus's crucifixion] in order for a theological—to make a theological point there. But that does not mean that Jesus wasn't crucified."

[6] See "Mike Licona Admits Contradictions in the Gospels." http://normangeisler.net/articles/Bible/Inspiration-Inerrancy/Licona/LiconaAdmitsContradictionsInGospels.htm. Accessed January 26, 2015.

interpretation. However, by this kind of separation of

interpretation and inerrancy, one can hold that the entire

Bible is inspired, even though there may be errors in given

passages. Clearly, this leaves a lot more latitude for errors

rejected by the traditional view. There are serious problems

with the suppositions involved in such a procedure. We will

examine several of these faulty assumptions below.

Examining the Assumptions of the Denial of Traditional Inerrancy

Assumption 1: Inspiration and Interpretation are Totally Separate Matters.

This view of totally separating of inspiration and

interpretation is open to serious challenge. For if inspiration

and interpretation are totally separate, then the Bible could

be inerrant, even if it affirmed nothing. But this is absurd.

The fact is that interpretation cannot be totally separated

from Inerrancy. If it could, then logically no text of

Scripture would have any meaning. It would be totally

vacuous. Inerrancy would be affirming nothing in the biblical text. But something has to be affirmed (or denied) in order for there to be meaning and truth. For a statement is meaningful only if it is either true or false. And it is true or false only if it either affirms or denies something. But, as Aristotle noted, truth is what corresponds to the facts. For "to say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false."[7] Aquinas concurred, saying, "truth is defined by the conformity of the intellect and the thing and hence to know this conformity is to know truth"[8] Modern philosopher G. E. Moore agreed, writing, "to say that this belief is true, is to say that there is in the Universe a fact to which it corresponds; and to say that it is false is to say that there is not in the Universe any fact to which it corresponds" [9]

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[7] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 7.6.25 in Richard McKeon, *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (NY: Random House, 1941).

[8] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.16.2 in Anton Pegis, *The Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (NY: Random House, 1944).

[9] G. E. Moore, *Some Main Problems in Philosophy* (NY: MacMillan, 1953), 279.

So, if the Bible has any meaning whatsoever, then it must be affirming or denying something. And, if it has any truths, then it must have affirmations or denials to which its statements correspond. So, its truthfulness (inerrancy) cannot be maintained totally apart from its affirmations (and denials). So, while interpretation and inerrancy are logically distinct, nonetheless, they are not actually separable.

Assumption 2: The Bible Could Be Inerrant, Even If its Interpretations were Completely Allegorical.

It is agreed by all sides of the debate that there is poetry (psalms), parable (Matt. 13), and allegory (Gal. 4:24) in the Bible. If so, then some critics argue that it is possible that any given passage (and by logical extension, all passages) could be taken allegorically. After all, if interpretation nd inerrancy are totally separate issues, then all passages could be taken allegorically (i.e., non-literally). Hence, it is possible that nothing in the Bible is literally

true, including the story of the Magi (Matt. 2) and the resurrection of the saints (Matt. 27).

Indeed, both Robert Gundry and Michael Licona have admitted this possibility. When Gundry was asked whether he would vote "yes" on Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy (who totally allegorized the Bible) to be a member of The Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), if she sincerely accepted its doctrinal statement on inerrancy, Gundry said, "I would vote yes…"![10] Likewise, when Licona was examined y the Southern Evangelical Seminary (SES) faculty about his views, he said "that if someone interpreted the resurrection accounts as metaphor and therefore denied the historicity of the Gospel accounts that would not contradict inerrancy." As a result, one faculty examiner exclaimed, "That was unbelievable."[11] Shocking

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[10] See *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society,* vol. 26, 1 (Lynchburg, VA: The Evangelical Theological Society, 1983), 86-94.

[11] Professor Thomas Howe, Ph.D, Letter to Norman Geisler, Sep 22, 2014.

as this may seem, it is a logical extension of the view that
interpretation and interpretation are totally separate issues.
That is to say, the Bible could be entirely inerrant without
anything in it being actually true.

Even Paul Tillich admits that God-talk could not be
totally symbolic. For there could be no negation of a literal
truth, if there were no preceding affirmation to be negated.
Something has to be literally true. Tillich believed the
statement that God is "Being" or "the Ground of Being" or,
better, "Being Itself" was literally true.[12] Indeed, logic
demands that not every statement about God (or reality)
can be non-literal. Something has to be literally true before
one can know that something else is not-literal. Every
negation of knowledge presupposes some positive
knowledge. Even the Neoplatonic mystic, Plotinus (3rd
cent. A.D.), contended that "It is impossible to say, 'Not

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[12] Paul Tilllich, *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1965), 46.

that' if one is utterly without experience or conception of the 'That.'"[13]

Likewise, inerrancy and interpretation cannot be totally separated. To assume they can be is logically incoherent. Yet both Gundry and Licona, and other Neo-evangelicals following them, argue that they can be totally separated. Thus, the basic premise behind this view is incoherent. Something has to be known to be literally true in order for us to know that something else is not literally true. Everything cannot be purely symbolic. The Bible must be actually making some literal truth claim before we can say it is inerrant.

Assumption 3: Since Interpretations are Entirely Separate Issue from Inerrancy, The Real Issue is One of Interpretation, Not One of Inerrancy.

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[13] Plotinus, *The Enneads*, translated By Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1966), 6.7.29.

It is argued that if interpretation is an entirely separate issue from inerrancy, then all debates about inerrancy boil down to matters of interpretation. But since there are many different and legitimate ways to interpret a biblical text, then the inerrancy issue becomes one of *how* one interprets the Bible.

In response, inerrancy and interpretation are not totally separate matters. Inerrancy implies a certain way to interpret the Bible. For even the statement that "the Bible is inerrant (without error)" involves an interpretation of some facts. Otherwise how could one know it was without error, unless he knew what was true (that is, what corresponds to the facts). As already noted, one cannot know what is not-true, unless he first knows what is true. But this is only possible if one has a proper understanding of that facts. Thus, inerrancy and interpretation are inseparably connected. Otherwise, the very statement that "The Bible is

without error" would mean no more than, "If anything is true in the Bible, then the Bible is true on this matter."

However, this is a hypothetical and vacuous statement, and it is clearly not what confessors of inerrancy mean when they claim "the Bible is completely without Error." What they mean is that "All of the many things the Bible does affirm as true, are true." In other words, inerrancy confessions are confessions of truth in the Bible—all the truth of the Bible.

Even in its landmark "Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" (1978), the ICBI framers recognized the connection between inspiration and interpretation by its Article XIII: "We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis…." Thus, "all the claims of the Bible must correspond with reality, whether that reality is historical, factual, or spiritual."[14]

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[14]Article XII of International Council of Biblical Inerrancy Commentary on Biblical Inerrancy (1982) edited by R. C. Sproul. Book I. *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy* (Charlotte, NC: Bastion Books, 2013).

Without the historical-grammatical (literal) interpretation of the Bible, one could not even embrace the doctrine of inerrancy.

This leads to another problem with the total separation of inspiration and interpretation. So, the ICBI statement on inerrancy includes a statement on the historical-grammatical method by which even that statement on inerrancy should be understood. And it looks forward to a fuller statement on the relation between interpretation and inerrancy which followed (in 1982).

Assumption 4: Truth is Not That Which Corresponds with the Facts

The reason many contemporary Bible critics can hold that the Bible is true, even if it is not literally true, is that they have rejected the correspondence view of truth in part or in whole, at least when it comes to some biblical texts. That is, they believe the Bible is true, even if it is sometimes mistaken. For "truth" in this sense does not have

to correspond with the facts. Truth is found in intentions so that something can be mistaken but if stated with good intentions, then it is still true. So, if one holds to the redemptive intent of a text, even if there are mistakes in it, then it is still true.

However, according to this faulty view of truth, virtually every sincerely uttered statement (no matter how many errors are in it), would be true. Further, the denial of the correspondence view of truth assumes the correspondence view of truth. For the statement that "The correspondence view is not true" assumes that this statement corresponds with reality. In fact, the correspondence view of truth is the bedrock of all communication. Without it, communication is impossible. Finally, totally symbolic language, with no anchors in the real world, is not possible. We cannot know what is not-literal (i.e., is symbolic) unless we know what is literal. Thus, inerrancy (the total truthfulness of Scripture) makes

no sense apart from a correspondence view of truth. For, unless something corresponds to the facts it cannot be true. So, for anything—let alone everything—in the Bible to be true, it must be literally true, even if it utilizes symbols and figures of speech to express this literal truth. For instance, the devil is a literal (real) person, even if he is symbolized as a dragon (Rev. 12:3), a serpent (Rev. 12:9), and a lion (1 Pet. 5:8).

Even statements that are symbolic presuppose a literal truth behind them by which we know the symbolic statement is not literal. So the literal truth is at the basis of all truth. Thus, without knowing the literal truth of the Bible we could not say it is inerrant. Ultimately, truth is anchored in some factual reality. Hence to confess the Bible is inerrant (completely true) is to confess that there is actual truth in it that corresponds to reality for this is what truth means. And a denial of the correspondence view of

truth lies at the basis of the denial of the literal truth of the

Bible.

ICBI made it very clear that its view of inerrancy

entailed a correspondence view of truth. The original

framer of the ICBI articles, R. C. Sproul, in his official

ICBI commentary on the famous "Chicago Statement on

Inerrancy" (1978) wrote: "By biblical standards of truth

and error is meant the view used both in the Bible and in

everyday life, viz., a correspondence view of truth."[15] It

adds, "This part of the article is directed toward those who

would redefine truth to relate merely to redemptive intent,

the purely personal, or the like, rather than to mean that

which corresponds with reality." Likewise, the ICBI

commentary on Hermeneutics (1982) adds: "We further

affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they

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[15] Ibid, Article XIII, Book I.

actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts"
(Article VI).[16]

So inerrancy, as defined by ICBI, is based on a
correspondence view of truth. But on this view of truth
everything cannot be symbolic. For nothing can be taken
symbolically unless one knows the literal truth of which it
is symbolic (non-literal). Correspondence with the literal
facts demands a literal interpretation of the facts. Thus, the
correspondence view of truth is at the basis of the belief
that a biblical narrative should be taken literally.

*Assumption 5: Biblical Narratives are not Necessarily
Historical*

Another assumption of the critics contrary to the
correspondence view of truth and the historical-
grammatical interpretation is that the biblical narratives do

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[16]*ICBI Commentary on Hermeneutics* (1982) adds: "We
further affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they
actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts" (Article VI,
Book II). *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy* (Bastion Books: 2013).

not have the presumption of historicity. When it comes to historical matters, some contemporary critics (like Licona) argue that the biblical record makes no presumption of historicity, even in the narrative sections. That is, a biblical narrative is neutral with regard to its historicity. One must prove its historicity or non-historicity.

However, this is based on a faulty premise. For just as the undeniable correspondence view of truth presumes a literal truth at the basis of all truth claims, even so, the correspondence view of truth also assumes that a narrative is telling the literal truth the Gospel writers are reporting, not creating the events. But according to *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, *Unabridged*, to "report" is "a statement of facts." Thus, those who deny the historicity of sections of the Gospels have denied the fact stated in the report. It is futile to say that Matthew does not report these events, for he reports them in the same sense that he reports other events (sometimes in the same chapter) that are taken

to be literally true about what happened, unless it is proven

to the contrary. Even when speaking of persons and events

in the present we assume a literal interpretation, likewise,

when the Bible speaks of persons and events in the past, we

presume it is to be understood literally, unless there are

clear indications to the contrary. For truth is what

corresponds to the facts. And literal truth implies some

literal facts. So, truth about the past (i.e., history) should be

understood to be literal, unless proven otherwise.

This is why the ICBI statement on inerrancy speaks

of the fallacious procedure of "dehistoricising" a record in

the Gospel narrative (Article XVIII). This implies that it

should have been taken historically and that it is

presumptively wrong not to do so.

However, this view is clearly contrary to the facts of the

matter for several reasons. First, ICBI adopted the

"grammatical-historical" method of interpreting the Bible

(Article XVIII). The grammatical-**historical** method, by its

very name assumes the historicity of the biblical text. It is also called the "literal" method of interpretation from the Latin *Sensus Literalis* (literal sense). Also, it applies the correspondence view of truth to the Genesis narrative which "affirms that Genesis 1-11 is factual, as is the rest of the book."[17] Finally, the ICBI official commentary defends the historicity of some of the most disputed Old Testament events. It says, "Some, for instance, take Adam to be a myth, **whereas he is presented as a historical person**. Others take Jonah to be an allegory when **he is presented as a historical person** and [is] so referred to by Christ.[18]"

The emphasized words in the above citations give the key to what should be presumed to be literal or historical, namely, whatever is presented as literal or historical! This presumption can be overcome only if there

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[17] See Article XXII in Book II of *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy* (Charlotte, NC: Bastion Books, 2013).
[18] Ibid., Article XIII, emphasis added.

are clear indications in the text or in other related texts to

the contrary—or if some moral or logical law (like the law

of non-contradiction) is being violated if it is taken literally.

For example, the command to "cut off your hand" (Mk.

9:43) to avoid sin—is a violation of a moral law against

mutilation. Or, "swallowing a camel" (Matt. 23:24)—

which is physically impossible.

Thus, those who deny the historicity of sections of

the Gospels have denied the facts stated in the report. It is

futile to say that Matthew does not report these events, for

he reports them in the same sense that he reports other

events (sometimes in the same chapter) that are taken to be

literally true.

A popular way to state the literal hermeneutic

illustrates this point, namely, "If the literal sense makes

good sense, then seek no other sense lest it result in non-

sense." Likewise, "if the literal sense does not make good

sense (because it violates some moral, rational, or physical

law), then some other sense must be sought lest it result in

non-sense." To apply this principle to narrative texts, we

could say that: "If the literal historical sense of a narrative

makes good sense, then seek no other sense lest it result in

non-sense." Likewise, "if the literal sense of a narrative

does not make good historical sense (because it violates

some moral, rational, or physical law), then seek some

other sense lest it result in non-sense." In brief, unless there

are clear indications to the contrary in a narrative text

(which by its very nature as a narrative has the presumption

of historicity), then it should be taken as literal history.

*Assumption 6: A Proper Hermeneutical Method is Neutral
on the Issue of Inerrancy*

Another faulty premise in claiming separation

between hermeneutics and inerrancy is the claim that there

are no unorthodox methods of interpretation. Methods are

hermeneutically and doctrinally neutral. By doctrine we

mean what one believes, and by hermeneutical method we

mean how one arrives at this belief. The question, then, is this: Can one's method be contrary to his doctrine? Can one deny *de facto* (in fact) what he affirms *de jure* (officially)? If so, then would not the methodology he utilizes undermine or negate the theology he confesses? Those who separate the two domains seem to think there is no connection when in actuality there is.

Take some examples from church history. The Averronian double-truth method.[19] Thirteenth-century followers of Averroes were condemned for holding a double-truth methodology whereby they could confess the truth of revelation at the same time they held truths of reason that contradicted it. Should an Averronian belong to an inerrancy society like the ETS? That is, should one

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[19] Although Averroes himself probably never held the "double-truth" method, nonetheless, in 1277 Siger of Brabant and followers were condemned by the Church for teaching that "things are true according to philosophy but not according to the Catholic faith, as though there were two contradictory truths." See "Averroism," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingston; Oxford: University Press, 1974) 116.

belong to ETS if he holds that the Bible is wholly true from

the standpoint of faith, yet from the standpoint of reason, he

also holds many things to be true that contradict truths of

Scripture? Indeed, by using this methodology the individual

contradicts the theology (i.e., bibliology) he confesses.

Despite the fact that they could confess revelation to be

inerrant, Averronians held things to be true (by reason) that

were contradictory to this revelation. Thus the alleged

confession to inerrancy is actually negated by other beliefs,

and the denial of inerrancy flows logically from their

method.

How about the allegorical method of Origen? He

professed the inspiration of the Bible, saying: "That this

testimony may produce a sure and unhesitating belief,

either with regard to what we have still to advance, or to

what has been already stated, it seems necessary to show, in

the first place, that the Scriptures themselves are divine, i.e., were inspired by the Spirit of God."[20]

On the other hand, Origen claimed that to take the story of Adam and Eve as literal is absurd. He believed this because he adopted an allegorical methodology. Thus, while he confesses a belief in total inerrancy his actual beliefs (resulting from his allegorical method) do not conform to an adequate understanding of total inerrancy, for he denies the truth of some parts of Scripture. In short, his methodology undermines his bibliology. He claims to believe what the Bible presents as true, but as a matter of fact he does not believe everything the Bible says happened, actually happened.

The same logic could be applied to a modern allegorist—for example, the Christian Scientist religion. There is no reason that Christian Scientists (followers of

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[20] Origen, *De Principiis*, 4.1.1 in A. Cleveland Coxe*, Fathers of the Third Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976 reprint.

Mary Baker Eddy) could not sincerely confess to believe the ETS or ICBI statements of inerrancy. Yet by their allegorical method they deny the deity of Christ, the historicity of the resurrection, and many other Biblical teachings. So, in effect, they take away with their left hand (hermeneutically) what they confesses with their right hand (bibliologically).

Three contemporary examples, Jack Rogers, Paul Jewett, and Robert Gundry, will make the point. Let's ask whether their methodology is consistent with their theology (particularly their bibliology). All three of these men profess to believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. At least two of them deny that there are any errors in the Bible (Rogers and Gundry), and one of them (Gundry) once belonged to the ETS.

Jack Rogers denied inerrancy by allowing for the possibility of factual mistakes in the Bible. He has a theological procedure that allows him to believe that the

Bible is true, even though not all statements in Scripture

need to represent things as they really are—that is, some

statements in Scripture may be mistaken. But this disavows

the classic statement of inspiration: "What the Bible says,

God says." This means that the Bible could affirm what

God denies. So if there is significant content in the ETS

statement, then someone like Jack Rogers would not be

consistent with the ETS confession on inerrancy.

Paul Jewett of Fuller Seminary was another case in

point. Jewett claimed to believe in the inspiration of the

Bible. He also acknowledged that the apostle Paul affirmed

that the husband is the head of the wife (1 Cor. 11:3).

However, he insisted that Paul was wrong here—that is,

God does not affirm what the apostle Paul affirms here.

Indeed, God denies it, for according to Jewett, the truth of

God is that the husband is not the head of the wife as Paul affirmed him to be.[21]

What implications does Jewett's view have for inerrancy? Simply this: He has denied in principle the classic statement of inerrancy: "What the Bible affirms, God affirms." For he believes this is a case where Scripture affirms as true that which is not true. If Jewett is right, then in principle when the interpreter discovers what the Bible is saying he must still ask one more very significant question: "Hath God said?" But that could only be determined by something that is outside the Bible. Thus, the Bible would not be the final authority for faith and practice.

In view of this denial that "what the Bible says, God says," Paul Jewett's view is inconsistent with that of ETS. So, despite Jewett's claim to orthodoxy he has a method

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[21] Paul Jewett, *Man* as *Male and Female* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975).

that is inconsistent with his confession. What he gives with the right hand Jewett confessionally takes away with the left hand hermeneutically. His unorthodox methodology belies his confession to orthodoxy (on the doctrine of Scripture). Indeed, Jewett is methodologically unorthodox.

The case of Robert Gundry is interesting and more crucial because he not only confesses to believe in inerrancy, but he also belonged to ETS which affirmed inerrancy. Yet like the other examples, he held a methodology that is inconsistent with the ETS doctrine of inerrancy. Thus, he was asked to resign from ETS by a vote of nearly three-quarters of its members in 1983. In spite of this, a significant section of ETS now desires that Gundry be restored to ETS.

In many respects, Gundry holds a limited form of the allegorical method. Like Origen, he confesses that the Bible is inspired. And, like Origen, when there are parts of the Bible that, if taken literally, seem to him to contradict

other parts of Scripture, then Gundry rejects their literal truth and takes a kind of allegorical (i.e., midrashic) interpretation of them. For example, Matthew reports that wise men followed a star, conversed with Herod and the scribes, went to Bethlehem, and presented gifts to Christ. Gundry, however, denies that these were literal events. He denies that Jesus literally went up on a mountain to give the Sermon on the Mount as Matthew reports it, and so on. So, while Gundry confesses to believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, he denies that these events reported by Matthew are literally and historically true. And more recently Gundry claims that there can be contradictions in the Gospels. In a presentation at Westmont College Oct 8, 2014 titled, "Peter: A False Disciple and Apostate as Portrayed by Matthew,"[22] Gundry cites Aristotle, saying, it

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[22] In this presentation from Oct 8, 2014 (http://youtu.be/QloN9EuOGXE) he cites Aristotle, saying, "In his worked called, *Poetics,* Aristotle defended the right of poets to engage in factual inconsistencies if they were necessary to make the desired point." However, this begs the question by assuming the Gospels are poetry, not history.

is OK "…to engage in factual inconsistencies if they were necessary to make the desired point." However, this appeal to Aristotle's *Poetics* begs the question by assuming the Gospels are poetry, not history. Clearly they are written in narrative form, not poetical form.

But to deny that what the Bible reports in these passages actually occurred is in effect to deny that the Bible is wholly true. As the 1982 "Chicago Statement on Hermeneutics" declares, "We deny that any event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated" (Article XIV). This is precisely what Gundry did—namely, he claimed that some events reported in Matthew did not actually occur but were invented by the gospel writer.

Neither will it suffice to point out that Rogers and Jewett officially deny the classic formula of inerrancy—"What the Bible says, God says"—but that Gundry does not officially deny it, for Origen and Christian Scientists

could hold this formula too. Denial of the formula renders one unorthodox, but affirmation of the mere formula does not necessarily make one's view orthodox. Nor is it sufficient to point out that while others deny inerrancy *de jure,* Gundry does not. Gundry's is a *de facto* denial of inerrancy, for he denies that some events reported in Scripture did in fact occur. But our ETS statement insists that we believe the entire Bible is true.

Still, some may insist that the implied evangelical content as to what the Bible is affirming should not exclude those whose method does not entail the denial of any major doctrine of Scripture. But Gundry affirms all major evangelical doctrines, such as the deity of Christ, his atoning death, his bodily resurrection, etc. Surely, then, Gundry's unorthodox methodology is not tantamount to unorthodoxy. Or is it? In response let us note several things.

First, the doctrine of the inspiration-inerrancy of Scripture is a major doctrine, and Gundry's method is a *de facto* denial of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. Inerrancy cannot be separated from interpretation For a divinely inspired error is a contradiction in terms. Even if his method never leads him actually to a denial of any other doctrine, it does deny one important doctrine, the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. In fact, as far as ETS is concerned this is the only explicitly stated doctrine by which one is tested for membership. So Gundry's denial of the occurrence of some events reported in the gospel of Matthew is a denial of the ETS doctrine that all Scripture is true.

It is acknowledged that Jewett's methodology has yet to lead him actually to deny any major doctrine. However, the method itself leads logically to a denial of a major doctrine—i.e., the doctrine of Scripture. For Jewett's method denies the principle of inerrancy that

"what the Bible says, God says." And even though Jewett did not apply his own implied principle ("What the Bible says, God does not necessarily say"), yet this does not mean it is not applicable elsewhere. The fact remains that the principle is applicable, and if it is applied it will lead logically to a denial of another major doctrine. For example, if Paul can be wrong (because of his rabbinical training) in affirming the headship of the husband over the wife, then logically what hinders one from concluding that Paul is (or could be) wrong in the same verse when he affirms the headship of Christ over the husband? Or if rabbinical background can influence an apostle to affirm error in Scripture, then how can we trust his affirmations about the resurrection in the same book (1 Cor. 15)? After all, Paul was a Pharisee, and Pharisees believed in the resurrection. If he had been a Sadducee perhaps his view on the resurrection would have been different. How then can we be sure that Paul is not also mistaken here on the

major doctrine of the resurrection? In fact, once one separates what the author of Scripture says from what God says, then the Bible no longer has any divine authority in any passage.

Although Gundry does not apply his allegorical (midrashic) interpretation to any major doctrine, the midrash methodology is applicable nonetheless. For example, why should one consider the report of the bodily resurrection of the saints after Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 27) allegorical and yet insist that Jesus' resurrection, which was the basis for it (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23), was literal? By what logic can we insist that the same author in the same book reporting the same kind of event in the same language can mean spiritual resurrection in one case and literal bodily resurrection in another case? Does not Gundry's method lead (by logical extension) to a denial of major doctrines of Scripture? And if it does, then there seems to be no more reason for including Gundry in

ETS than to include Origen, Rogers, or Jewett. They all do (or could) affirm the inerrancy of Scripture, and yet all have a method that actually negates or undermines inerrancy in some significant way.

Even if one could builds safeguards into the midrash method whereby all major doctrines are preserved from allegorization, there is another lethal problem with Gundry's view. The ETS statement on inerrancy entails the belief that everything reported in the Gospels is true ("the Bible in its entirety"). But Gundry believes that some things reported in Matthew did not occur (e.g., the story of the Magi [chap. 2], the report of the resurrection of the saints [chap. 27], etc.). It follows therefore that Gundry does not really believe everything reported in the Gospels is true, despite his claim to the contrary. And this is a *de facto* denial of inerrancy.

It will not suffice to say that Matthew does not really report these events, for he reports them in the same sense

that he reports other events that Gundry believes actually occurred. In fact, on his view, some stories that seem to be more likely candidates for midrash (for example, the appearance of angels to the Jewish shepherds in Luke 2) Gundry takes as literal, whereas the earthly pilgrimage of astrologers following a sign in the sky he takes as imaginary (i.e., midrash). Regardless, the fact of the matter is that Gundry denies that certain events reported in Scripture (Matthew) actually occurred. This means in effect that he is denying the truth of these parts of Scripture. And if he denies in effect that the Bible is true "in its entirety," then Gundry has disqualified himself from ETS.

An Objection Considered

Does not the above argument prove too much? Granted the finitude and fallibility of man, is it not a reasonable presumption that we are all inconsistent in our beliefs in some way or another? Therefore should we not all be

excluded from ETS, ICBI, or other inerrancy affirming group?

In response, there are several crucial differences between common inconsistency of belief and a conscious commitment to a methodology that undermines our important beliefs. First, the common inconsistencies with which we are all plagued are usually unconscious inconsistencies. When they are brought to our attention we work to eliminate them. On the other hand a theological method such as Gundry's midrash or Licona's Greco-Roman genre method is a conscious commitment. Further, and more importantly, common inconsistencies are not recommended as a formal method by which we are to interpret Scripture. Hence they have no official didactic force. They do not purport to teach us how to discover the truth of Scripture. Gundry's method, however, entails a crucial truth claim. It claims that by using this method we will discover the truth that God is really affirming in

Scripture. After all, Gundry's method proposes to tell us what it is that the Bible is actually saying and thus what God is actually saying. This makes a conscious commitment to a theological method a very serious matter, for a hermeneutical method purports to be the means by which we discover the very truth of God.

Further, there is another possible difference between common inconsistencies and the serious inconsistency in which these NT critics engage. The former do not necessarily lead logically to a denial of a major doctrine, but the latter can. As was noted earlier, unorthodoxy in methodology leads logically to unorthodoxy in theology. This is true regardless of whether the proponent of the method makes this logical extension himself. For example, a "double-truth" theory or an allegorical method leads logically to a denial of the literal truth of Scripture.

Now let us consider the question: Is conscientious confession of the doctrine of inerrancy solely in terms of what the confessor takes it to mean a sufficient ground for determining orthodoxy on this doctrine? We suggest that the answer to this is negative for several reasons.

First, making conscientious confession of inerrancy the only test of orthodoxy is tantamount to saying that sincerity is a test for truth. But as is well known even the road to destruction is paved with good intentions (Prov. 14:12).

Second, a statement does not mean what the *reader* takes it to mean to him. It means what the *author* meant by it. If this is not so, then a statement can mean anything the reader wants it to mean, including the opposite of what the author meant by it. If this were the case then neo-orthodox theologians and liberals could also belong to ETS, since many of them believe that the Bible is inerrant in some sense (usually in its purpose).

Third, no theological organization has integrity without some objective, measurable standard by which its identity can be determined. In the case of ETS, the standard was the stated doctrine of inerrancy: "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs." But if anyone can take this statement to mean that the Bible is true in any sense he wishes—as long as he believes it sincerely—then an inerrancy affirming organization has no doctrinal integrity.

Benedict Spinoza, a Jewish pantheist and anti-supernaturalist, denied virtually every major doctrine in the Bible. Nonetheless, he sincerely believed that he was orthodox and acting in accordance with Scripture. He wrote: "I am certified of thus much: I have said nothing unworthy of Scripture or God's Word, and I have made no assertions which I could not prove by most plain argument

to be true. I can therefore, rest assured that I have advanced nothing which is impious or even savours of impiety." [23]

So we must conclude that sincerity is an insufficient test for orthodoxy. In addition to sincerity there must also be conformity to some objective standard or norm for orthodoxy, for truth is conformity with reality. And without such conformity one is not truly orthodox, regardless of his confession to the contrary. Our Lord made it clear that mere confession of him was not enough, for he denied those who confessed "Lord, Lord" but did not "do the will of the Father" (Matt 7:21). Likewise, saying "I believe, I believe" (in total inerrancy) is not sufficient. One's beliefs must truly conform to the fact that all of Scripture is true before he is considered orthodox on this point. So it is not mere subjective confession but objective conformity that is the sufficient test for orthodoxy.

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[23] Benedict Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. N. Eles (NY: Dover Publication, 1962), 166 [Chapter XII].

Conclusion

We have shown that there are some hermeneutical methods (like the "double-truth" method and total allegorical method) that are inconsistent with a belief in the ETS statement on inerrancy. Given this, there are two questions: Where should we draw the line? And, why should we draw it there? In the above discussion, I have offered a criterion for drawing such a line—that is, for determining methodological unorthodoxy. Briefly it is this: Any hermeneutical or theological method that logically or by necessary consequence, undermines a major doctrine of all of Scripture is an unorthodox method. The method can do this either *de jure* or *de facto*.

It seems to me that if we do not accept some such criterion we are admitting the emptiness of our confession of inerrancy. For if the ETS or ICBI inerrancy statements of faith do not exclude any particular belief about Scripture,

then it includes all beliefs about Scripture. And whatever says everything, really says nothing.

So, in order to preserve our identity and integrity as an evangelical group that confesses an inerrant Word from God, we must define the limits of a legitimate methodology. One thing seems safe to predict: Granted the popularity of evangelicalism and the degree to which the borders of legitimate evangelical methodology are now being pushed, a group will not long be "evangelical" nor long believe in inerrancy in the sense meant by the framers of that statement unless it acts consistently on this matter.

In short we would argue that, since methodology determines one's theology, unless we place some limits on evangelical methodology there will follow a continued broadening of the borders of "evangelical" theology so that the original word will have lost its meaning. After all, even Barth called his neo-orthodox view "evangelical." Is this what the word "evangelical" meant to the founders of ETS

or ICBI? Or have they already conceded so much to the "new hermeneutic" that it does not really matter what the words "evangelical" or "*inerrant*" meant to the authors of the statements, but only what they mean *to us*? On the other hand, if one rejects this kind of subjective hermeneutic (and we most certainly should), then it behooves us to draw a line that will preserve its identity and integrity as an "evangelical" society. Such a line, we suggest, need not entail a change in (or addition to) our doctrinal statement but simply the explicit acknowledgment (perhaps in the by-laws) that the denial of the total truth (inerrancy) of Scripture, officially or factually, *de jure* or *de facto, is* grounds for exclusion from ETS.

It is assumed, however, that a conscientious confession is a necessary condition for membership in an organization that confess inerrancy, even though it is not a

sufficient condition. That truth involves conformity to reality we have argued elsewhere.[24]

The 1982 "Chicago Statement on Hermeneutics" has a clear and succinct statement on this point: "WE AFFIRM that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute. We further affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts. WE DENY that, while Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation, biblical truth should be defined in terms of this function. We further deny that error should be defined as that which willfully deceives" (Article VI).

In brief, belief in biblical inerrancy is not just a matter of personal interpretation. It has an objective

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[24] See N. L. Geisler, "The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate," *BibSac* (October-December 1980) 327–339, reprinted in *The Living and Active Word of God* (ed. M. Inch and R. Youngblood; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983) 225-236.

meaning given to it by virtue of its adoption of the

historical-grammatical interpretation. That is to say, it

implies at its basis a literal interpretation of the history and

events without which it would be meaningless.

A Critical Evaluation of Robert H. Gundry's Lecture—Peter: False Disciple And Apostate According To Saint Matthew

F. David Farnell[1]

Introduction[2]

In 2013, the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) had as its theme "Evangelicalism, Inerrancy, and ETS." The present writer had **learned** from direct eyewitnesses who were present observed a strong call for Robert Gundry's reinstatement as a member of ETS. Strong verbal cries as well as applause broke out in one particular session. This is not surprising, for troubling events have been occurring at ETS as it pertains to the degeneration of the orthodox

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[1] F. David Farnell, Ph.D. is Professor of New Testament at The Master's Seminary and editor/contributor to many works in New Testament, e.g. *The Jesus Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998); *The Jesus Quest* (Mailtand, FL: Xulon), and the upcoming *Introduction to Biblical Criticism* (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2015).

[2] Westmont College Blog -- http://blogs.westmont.edu/2014/09/22/gundry-to-unveil-peter-as-false-prophet/ and You Tube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QloN9EuOGXE transcribed and accessed on October 9, 2014. All quotes taken from a transcript of this lecture.

meaning of inerrancy for many years now. Even in the present writer's days as a doctoral student from 1986 to 1990, ominous developments among its members regarding changes in evangelical definitions of inerrancy were gaining more frequency. These developments manifested themselves in many of the classes attended, which are now conducted by prominent ETS members who have risen to take on influential roles at the Society.

Another troubling event at the 2013 gathering was the Presidential address delivered by Robert Yarborough, Professor of New Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary. Wherein Yarborough praised another ETS scholar, Craig Blomberg, for his latest book, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* (Baker 2014).[3] Yarborough's high praise for Blomberg are as follows:

> Excellent recent books demonstrate the cogency and vitality of a reverent and indeed an inerrantist stance. Two such books were

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[3] Robert W. Yarborough, "The Future of Cognitive Reverence for The Bible," *JETS* 57/1 (2014) 5-18.

made available to me in pre- publication form
for this address.

1. Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the
Bible?* The first is by Craig Blomberg, *Can
We Still Believe the Bible? An Evangelical
Engagement with Contemporary Questions*.
Blomberg takes up six issues that he finds
foundational to an affirmation of the Bible's
comprehensive credibility like that affirmed
by this society.18 In each of these categories,
Blomberg cites the literature of those who
reject a high view of the Bible's veracity or
authenticity. As he points out, those critical
of the Bible's truth often do not return the
favor, stonewalling evangelical arguments
and publications as if that class of scholarship
did not even exist. Blomberg calls attention
to the best studies he can find that reject his
viewpoint. He then argues for the position
from his inerrantist standpoint. He notes,
"Not a single supposed contra- diction" in
Scripture "has gone without someone
proposing a reasonably plausible
resolution."19 He also notes the irony that
some are abandoning inerrancy today when
"inerrantists have the ability to define and
nuance their understanding of the doctrine
better than ever before."

This book is refreshing and important
not only because of its breadth of coverage of
issues, viewpoints, and literature. It is
evenhanded in that both enemies of inerrancy
and wrong-headed friends are called on the
carpet. Blomberg revisits incidents like
Robert Gundry's dismissal from this society

and the kerfluffle over a decade ago surrounding the TNIV and inclusive language. He does not mince words in criticizing those he sees as overzealous for the inerrancy cause. Nor is he bashful in calling out former inerrantists who, Blomberg finds, often make their polemical arguments against what they used to believe with less than compelling warrant. I predict that everyone who reads the book will disagree strongly with the author about something. At the same time, the positive arguments for inerrancy are even more sub- stantial. It is clear that Blomberg is not content with poking holes in non-inerrantist arguments. He writes, "I do not think one has to settle for anything short of full- fledged inerrantist Christianity so long as we ensure that we employ all parts of a detailed exposition of inerrancy, such as that found in the Chicago Statement." Or again: "These Scriptures are trustworthy. We can still believe the Bible. We should still believe the Bible and act accordingly, by following Jesus in disciple- ship."22 I am skimming some of his concluding statements, but the real meat of the book is inductive demonstration of inerrancy's plausibility based on primary evidence and scholarship surrounding that evidence. If only a book of this substance had been available when I was a college or grad school student![4]

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[4] Yarborough, 8-9.

Why does the present writer mention these troubling
statements and events together? Because support for
Gundry (as will be seen in this discussion), the current
trends at ETS, and Blomberg's book share in common a
massive assault on orthodox views of inerrancy as
expressed by the ICBI documents of 1978 and 1982. The
present writer doubts strongly that one can both affirm
honest belief or genuine support of the ICBI view of
inerrancy and hermeneutics while simultaneously
endorsing and praising Blomberg's book (especially
chapters 4-5).[5] Yarborough's title constitutes an irony in
that if his article indicates a future trend at ETS (the largest
evangelical scholarly society in the world), the society is in
grave difficulty since many of its members now embrace
aberrant concepts of inerrancy in contradiction to the ETS

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[5] For a more extensive review of Blomberg's work, see F.
David Farnell, "Review of Craig Blomberg's *Can We Still Believe The
Bible? An Evangelical Engagement With Contemporary Questions.*"
MSJ 25.1 (Spring 2014) 99-104.

doctrinal statement that has adopted ICBI as its definition

of inerrancy.

Not only did Yarborough praise Blomberg's work, [6]

but so also did evangelical critical scholar Darrell Bock in

the following terms,

> Craig Blomberg's fourth chapter in *Can We Still Believe the Bible*, examines some objections to inerrancy from both the right and the left. Yes, there is a position to the right of holding to inerrancy. It is holding it in a way that is slow to recognize solutions that fit within the view by undervaluing the complexities of interpretation. People are far more familiar with those who challenge inspiration and doubt what Scripture declares on the left, but others attempt to build a fence around the Bible by being slow to see where legitimate discussion exists about how inerrancy is affirmed. To make the Bible do too much can be a problem, just as making it do too little.[7]

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[6] See Norman L. Geisler and F. David Farnell, *The Jesus Quest, The Danger from Within* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2014) and note especially pp. 361-520 for this discussion.

[7] http://canwestillbelieve.com/ accessed on October 7, 2014; See also Bock's Blog, http://blogs.bible.org/bock/darrell_l._bock/craig_blombergs_can_we_b elieve_the_bible-_chapter_4 accessed on October 7, 2014.

History is now being forgotten, definitions of inerrancy either disregarded or changed at ETS, or something else quite unsettling is afoot for the future of evangelicalism as represented by this Society that happens to be home to several thousand evangelical scholars. Robert Gundry's recent lecture[8] serves as a very timely, strategic rminder as well as a call to vigilance by those who would affirm faith in the trustworthiness of God's Word. This paper will analyze the reappearance of Gundry and his hermeneutical approach.

A Brief Review of History

In 1982, ETS was rocked by crisis that was, at that time, considered a major storm on the subject of inerrancy. [9]
ETS had been founded in 1949 by evangelical scholars who

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[8] October 6, 2014, at Westmont College, [available on youtube.com (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QloN9EuOGXE)].

[99] For an excellent historical review of the crisis surrounding Robert Gundry, see Norman L. Geisler, "A Brief History of the Evangelical Theological Society on the Discipline of Its Membership," *The Jesus Quest*, 349-357.

had witnessed the assault on the inspiration and authority of
Scripture by the fundamentalist/modernist controversy of
the early 20th Century. The theme of the Society was
simple, "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the
Word of God and is therefore inerrant in the autographs."
Since God was considered the author of both the OT and
NT by members of ETS at the time, neither God nor His
Word could err. However, in 1982, a blatant example of
signing the inerrancy statement by Gundry and yet
contradicting such an affirmation came to the forefront
through his *Matthew*, *A Commentary on His Literary and
Theological Art*, with the second edition entitled, *Matthew*,
*A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church
under Persecution* (1994).[10] Applying a term called
"midrash," i.e. a Jewish hermeneutic approach popular in

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[10] Robert H. Gundry, Matthew, *A Commentary on His Literary
and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) and the second
edition entitled, Matthew *A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed
Church under Persecution* (Eerdmans, 1994).

Second Temple Judaism during the Intertestamental and New Testament periods that essentially dehistoricized and/or allegorized much of the historical content of Scripture, Gundry applied this approach in his commentary on Matthew. Offering no demonstrable proof that much of Matthew was to be understood **as** non-historical in nature but merely a priori forcefully applying Midrash on the sheer weight of his scholarship. As a result, Gundry denied the historical nature of the Gospel of Matthew, especially, but not limited to the infancy narratives.

The following is a partial list of what Gundry asserted should not be understood as literal, historical but figurative in Matthew:

> 9. "Clearly, Matthew treats us to history mixed with elements that cannot be called historical in a modern sense. All history writing entails more or less editing of materials. But Matthew's editing often goes beyond acceptable bounds . . . . Matthew's subtractions, additions, and revisions of order and phraseology often show changes in substance; i.e., they represent developments of the dominical tradition that result in

different meanings and departures from the actuality of events" (p. 623). [11]

10. "Comparison with the other gospels, especially with Mark and Luke, and examination of Matthew's style and theology show that he materially altered and embellished historical traditions and that he did so deliberately and often" (p. 639).

11. "We have also seen that at numerous points these features exhibit such a high degree of editorial liberty that the adjectives 'midrashic' and 'haggadic' become appropriate" (p. 628). Midrash means it did not happen in history as it was presented in the Gospels.

12. "We are not dealing with a few scattered difficulties. We are dealing with a vast network of tendentious changes" (p. 625). This means it did not happen in history as it was presented in the Gospels.

13. "Hence, 'Jesus said' or 'Jesus did' need not always mean that in history Jesus said or did what follows, but sometimes may mean that in the account at least partly constructed by Matthew himself Jesus said or did what follows" (p. 630). This means it did not

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[11]The list of 9-13 as well as page numbers cited is from Robert Gundry, *Matthew A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) as well as *A Commentary on His Handbook for A Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). The latter note: 1994 is an updated version of the 1982 commentary.

happen in history as it was presented in the Gospels.

14. "Semantics aside, it is enough to note that the liberty Matthew takes with his sources is often comparable with the liberty taken with the OT in Jubilees, the Genesis Apocryphon, the Targums, and the Midrashim and Haggadoth in rabbinic literature" (p. 628). This means it did not happen in history as it was presented in the Gospels.

15. "These patterns attain greatest visibility in, but are by no means limited to, a number of outright discrepancies with the other synoptics. At least they are discrepancies so long as we presume biblical writers were always intending to write history when they used the narrative mode" (p. 624).

16. "Matthew selects them [the Magi] as his substitute for the shepherds in order to lead up to the star, which replaces the angel and heavenly host in the tradition" (p. 27). The Magi, the star and the heavenly hosts did not happen as is presented in the Gospels.

17. "That Herod's statement consists almost entirely of Mattheanisms supports our understanding Matthew himself to be forming this episode out of the shepherd's visit, with use of collateral materials. The description of the star derives from v. 2. The shepherds' coming at night lies behind the starry journey of the magi" (p. 31).

13. "He [Matthew] changes the sacrificial slaying of 'a pair of turtledoves or two young

> pigeons,' which took place at the presentation
> of the baby Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:24;
> cf. Lev 12:6-8), into Herod's slaughtering the
> babies in Bethlehem (cf. As. Mos. 6:2-6" (pp.
> 34, 35). This means these did not happen in
> history as it was presented in the Gospels.

A firestorm at ETS resulted, for many found shocking that

Gundry fully asserted his belief in inerrancy and yet

dehistoricized large portions of Matthew as literary fiction

rather than as historical, the latter being what the orthodox

church had maintained throughout the centuries. The

question of literary genre used to dehistoricize large

portions of the Gospels had come to prominence at ETS.

Gundry was asked to resign from ETS by a 70% vote. To

his credit, Gundry resigned rather than cause further

disturbance to the Society.

The resignation was not without supporters for

Gundry. For instance, Craig Blomberg defended Robert

Gundry's midrashic approach to the Gospels in the

following terms:

Is it possible, even inherently probable, that the NT writers at least in part never intended to have their miracle stories taken as historical or factual and that their original audiences probably recognized this? If this sounds like the identical reasoning that enabled Robert Gundry to adopt his midrashic interpretation of Matthew while still affirming inerrancy, that is because it is the same. The problem will not disappear simply because one author [Gundry] is dealt with *ad hominem*…how should evangelicals react? Dismissing the sociological view on the grounds that the NT miracles present themselves as historical gets us nowhere. So do almost all the other miracle stories of antiquity. Are we to believe them all?[12]

Yet, Blomberg continues as a member of ETS signing the

sole doctrinal statement of "inerrancy" as defined by ICBI.

He also takes historically understood sections of the Gospel

as non-historical, Jesus' command to Peter of the coin in

the fishes mouth is not historical, it did not happen (Matt.

17:24-27). Craig Blomberg asserts in reference to the story

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[12] Craig L. Blomberg, "New Testament Miracles and Higher Criticism: Climbing Up the Slippery Slope," *JETS* 27/4 (December 1984) 436.

of the coin in the fish's mouth in Matthew 17:24-27, "It is

often not noticed that the so-called miracle of the fish with

the coin in its mouth (Matt 17:27) is not even a narrative; it

is merely a command from Jesus to go to the lake and catch

such a fish. We don't even know if Peter obeyed the

command. Here is a good reminder to pay careful attention

to the literary form."[13]

Another recent example is Michael Licona, who

pursues a tactic similar to Gundry and Blomberg. For

example, the resurrection of Saints in Matthew 27:51-53

did not happen. It is special effects. In his work *The

Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical

Approach,*[14] used Greco-Roman *bios* literature, a tactic

similar to Gundry's allegorical midrashic approach, as a

means of de-historicizing parts of the Gospel (i.e. Matthew

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[13]Blomberg, "A Constructive Traditional Response to New Testament Criticism," 354 fn. 32

[14]Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus, A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010).

27:51-53 with the resurrection of the saints after Jesus

crucifixion is non-literal genre or apocalyptic rather than an

actual historical event).[15] Licona argued "*Bioi* offered the

ancient biographer great flexibility for rearranging material

and **inventing speeches . . . and they often included**

legend. Because *bios* was a flexible genre, **it is often**

difficult to determine where history ends and legend

begins."[16] Licona labels it a "strange little text"[17] and terms

it "special effects" that have no historical basis.[18] His

apparent concern also rests with only Matthew as

mentioning the event. He concludes that "Jewish

eschatological texts and thought in mind" as "most

plausible" in explaining it.[19] He concludes that "It seems

best to regard this difficult text in Matthew a poetic device

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[15] Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus, A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010).
    [16] Ibid., 34.
    [17] *Resurrection*, 548
    [18] *Resurrection*, 552.
    [19] *Resurrection*, 552.

added to communicate that the Son of God had died and

that impending judgment awaited Israel."[20]

All of these, Gundry as well as the others cited, sign

the ETS doctrinal statement, but one is left wondering what

they mean by the term "inerrancy," especially since ICBI of

1978 warned against such dehistoricizing of the plain,

normal sense of Scripture,. Article XVIII states:

> **We affirm** that the text of Scripture is to be
> interpreted by grammatico-historical
> exegesis, taking account of its literary form
> and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret
> Scripture. **We deny** the legitimacy of any
> treatment of the text or quest for sources lying
> behind it that leads to relativizing,
> dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching,
> or rejecting its claims to authorship.

History is being forgotten.[21] Gundry's upcoming Festschrift

that prompted his appearance at Westmont College on

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[20] *Resurrection*, 553.

[21] Historical Criticism In Biblical Criticism: Part 2: How "Errancy" Masquerades As "Inerrancy," on defendinginerrancy.com.

[21] All quotes from the video that are taken in this article come from a transcript of the video/audio on youtube.com-- Westmont College Blog -- http://blogs.westmont.edu/2014/09/22/gundry-to-unveil-peter-as-false-prophet/ and You Tube-- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QloN9EuOGXE&feature=youtu.be

October 6, 2014, as well as current developments in ETS among its members serve at this strategic time in history to stir memory of past events to prevent future tragedies for evangelicalism that are now rearing up again.

Gundry's Position on the Apostle Peter— "Peter the Apostate and False Disciple According to St. Matthew."[22]

How does Gundry make such a startling claim? Gundry's position here is not new, for his 1994 (Second Edition) commentary, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution*, and 1982 (First Edition) commentary, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, maintained a similar position

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transcribed and accessed on October 9, 2014.See, F. David Farnell, "The 'Magic' Of Historical Criticism In Biblical Criticism: Part 2: How "Errancy" Masquerades As "Inerrancy," on defendinginerrancy.com.

[22] All quotes from the video that are taken in this article come from a transcript of the video/audio on youtube.com-- Westmont College Blog -- http://blogs.westmont.edu/2014/09/22/gundry-to-unveil-peter-as-false-prophet/ and You Tube-- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QloN9EuOGXE&feature=youtu.be transcribed and accessed on October 9, 2014.

to this lecture.[23] So this position goes back to his days at

ETS when he signed the inerrancy statement for

membership.

Never in the history of the Church has Peter ever

been regarded in the sense in which Gundry says Matthew

"portrays" him. When confronted with the issue of novelty,

Gundry has no problem with his novelty. Gundry responds

to novelty suggestions as follows:

> But there's another question that may be
> running through your heads it's this: "in the
> history of interpretation, why hasn't it been
> recognized until now that Matthew portrays
> Peter as a false disciple and apostate?". My
> former colleague here at Westmont, Moisés
> Silva, thinks this question may be the
> "Achilles heel" of what I've presented to you.
> I'll divide my answer into three parts. First,
> from the earliest times Christians were
> bothered by differences between the Gospels
> so they tried to harmonize them. Already in

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[23] See, for example, both Gundry's Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art and Matthew *A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 548-49, 589-90 for this position on the same pages for both editions.

the second century, the early church father Tatian produced a harmony of the gospels called "The Diatessaron" by weaving together the various texts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The highly influential St. Augustine produced another such harmony. The protestant reformer, Andreas Osiander, produced yet another one, in which to avoid discrepancies between the various accounts of Peter's denials of Jesus, Osiander posited eight denials of Jesus by Peter, a number of denials even exceeding the six that were posited much later by Harold Lindsell, a former trustee of Westmont, in his book *Battle for the Bible*. When in a telephone conversation I objected that the Bible said three denials not three times", an answer I consider more harmful than helpful to a high view of biblical inspiration. Regrettably, the college course that I took in New Testament Survey had as a required textbook "A Harmony of the Gospels" compiled by the great Southern Baptist Greek scholar A.T. Robertson. But why should I complain? I myself used and required Robertson's harmony for some years when first teaching Life in Literature in the New Testament right here at Westmont. Until I woke up to how unscriptural it was. The New Testament gives us four different gospels, not one harmonious gospel. My point is that the apologetic impulse towards harmonization, to make everything agree, joined forces with the

accounts of Peter's rehabilitation in Luke, Acts, and John 21, and by implication the rest of the New Testament, the apologetic influence and impulse joined forces also with the tradition of Peter's martyrdom to ameliorate, to soften the harshness of Matthew's portrayal in the minds of those who read and heard the first Gospel. In view of what we know about Peter elsewhere, surely Matthew's portrayal can't be taken at face value. Or so it seemed to Christians who fear any disagreements among the Gospels. Second, the softening of Matthew's harsh portrayal of Peter, the airbrushing of it, has proved irresistibly attractive because it offers comfort to Christians who see in themselves a Peter like mixture of good and bad behavior, of success and failure, and at the same time a promise of ultimate salvation. How often do you hear people say Peter is their favorite Apostle? Just last summer somebody told me that very thing and gave me that very reason, "I see myself in Peter". Well if you don't want to see yourself as a false disciple and apostate, neither do you want to see your favorite apostle, Peter, as a false disciple and apostate no matter what Matthew says. The attractiveness of Peter, a Peter who offers us a mirror image of our flawed selves, remains a hindrance to even handed, clear---eyed exegesis. Third, the somewhat tardy, but growing weight of Roman Catholicism's appeal to the purported

authority of Peter, left a largely favorable impression of him not only in the minds of people inside the Roman Catholic communion, but also as a carryover from pre---reformation days even on the minds of Protestants and Orthodox Christians. The current ecumenical movement and friendly Protestant, Roman Catholic dialogue, plus the larger cultural emphasis on tolerance and God's supposedly unconditional love, create further obstacles to an unblinking recognition that Matthew does indeed like it or not portray Peter as a false disciple and apostate.[24]

In sum, how can Gundry reach such a novel approach, the only one in church history who has ever seen Peter in such a light? First, by deprecating, or really, eliminating harmonization. Second, by a subjective, imaginative assertion of psychology that somehow the church found comfort in Peter's "good and bad behavior." Third, the

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[24] Westmont College Blog -- http://blogs.westmont.edu/2014/09/22/gundry--to-unveil--peter--as--false--prophet/ and You Tube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QloN9EuOGXE&feature=youtu.be transcribed and accessed on October 9, 2014. All quotes taken from a transcript of this lecture.

influence of Romanism on the church, as well as the current ecumenical movement toward reproachment with Roman Catholicism.

Gundry's second and third assertions carry **no** weight for support to his argument. Psychological assertions like his have no real substance. He offers no proof, just his subjective bias. Might such subjective bias as Gundry displays reflect his own personal subjective, internal disposition regarding his own behavior? One cannot know except that the second argument bears no weight whosoever to substantiate his claim.

As with the second argument, the third argument proffered has no weight either. The Reformers, who were no friend of the Papacy, never reflected such a bias toward Peter as Gundry's hypothesis sustains. Such a bias might naturally have arisen among them since the papacy and Romanism, constituted for them a virulent enemy.

Gundry's first argument, however, regarding his rejection of the principle harmonization, is quite telling, for Gundry's hypothesis could not really proceed unless he is dismissive of such a decisive hermeneutical procedure. Indeed, it is only by rejecting harmonization outright that Gundry's thesis can be sustained. A close look at the other Gospel writers as well as other books of the New Testament reveal quite a different picture of Peter. For instance,

(1) Mark 16:7 specifically lists Peter as being cited by Jesus to meet him in Galilee. Papias is very clear that Mark's Gospel reflects the apostolic preaching of Peter. For example, in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History,* 3.39.15-16,[25] Papias commented that in composing his gospel, Mark, being Peter's interpreter, "wrote accurately all that he remembered . . . of the things said *or done* by the Lord"

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[25] This quote is taken from Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. I with an English Translation by Kirsopp Lake. Loeb Classical Library Series (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1926), 297.

[emphasis added] and immediately after this spoke of Peter as "not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them." Papias' testimony answers the question as to whether Mark was in any sense dependent on Matthew as the Two-Gospel Theory would require, for Mark wrote on the basis of Peter's preaching, not on the basis of literary dependence on Matthew. If Papias be ancient and very early testimony be accepted, and no substantive reason really exists for discounting it, then even Peter himself did not view his denial in the terms that Gundry takes it. While Matthew excludes Peter specifically in Matthew 28:7, this constitutes an argument from silence rather than any other substantive proof for Gundry. Indeed, if Matthew is the first Gospel,[26] and not the product of Mark, Matthew may merely have

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[26] See F. David Farnell, "The Synoptic Gospels in the Ancient Church: The Testimony to the Priority of Matthew's Gospel," *MSJ* 10/1 (Spring 1999) 53-86.

generalized the command of Jesus, while Mark especially singled out his mentor, Peter, based on Peter's remembering of Jesus' command to meet him in Galilee. Moreover, the likelihood that Jesus mentioned Peter is strengthened when one remembers that Mark reflects Peter's preaching and who would better remember his own personal invitation to meet Jesus than Peter himself!

(2) A look at other portions of the New Testament also reveal a contradictory position to that of Gundry's novel view on Peter in Matthew's Gospel.

The Gospel of Luke foreshadows not only Peter's denial Peter's restoration in the following terms, "Luke 22:32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Luke 22:55-62 also records Peter's denial and bitter weeping because of it. Luke 24:12 has Peter at the Jesus' tomb upon hearing of His resurrection, an

indication of a change of mind in sharp contrast to his denial.

The Gospel of John 21:15-19 has Jesus seeking Peter out specifically, ministering to Peter and restoring him to full ministry with "Feed my sheep" and "follow Me." The Gospel of John also has John and Peter competing in a foot-race to the empty tomb (John 20:4-5).

Acts 1-13 gives a very prominent role to Peter in the early days of the church. Far from being presented in Gundry's terms, Peter is leading the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2); boldly proclaiming Jesus with the Apostle John before the Sanhedrin after the healing of the lame man at the Temple (Acts 3-4); taking prominence in the church discipline of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), and prominence in reaching the Gentiles, as typified with Cornelius for the Gospel (Acts 10).

Indeed, two books were accepted as canonical by the early church with Peter's name (1-2 Peter), so that it is dubious that the early church ever thought of Peter in Gundry's terms.[27]

All of this is acknowledged by Gundry in his presentation. One could pursue further harmonization throughout the NT with regard to Peter, but Gundry **undisturbed** by these efforts. Why? He outright rejects such harmonization with other portions of the New Testament. To Gundry, these harmonizations fail to reveal Matthew's position of Peter's false discipleship and apostasy. Gundry will not have any external evidence brought into Matthew. In his recent lecture, Gundry contends,

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[27] For a wonderful history of the canon of the early church and its integrity from the very nascent beginnings of Christianity, consult David L. Dungan, noting especially Chapter 5, Against Pagans and Heretics: Eusebius's Strategy in Defense of the Catholic Scriptures (Chap. 5), in Constantine's Bible, Politics and the Making of the New Testament (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), pp. 54-93.

> Well, in the first place, Matthew isn't Mark, Luke, John, or Paul, so Matthew's take on Peter doesn't have to agree with theirs, unless you hold to a certain view of scriptural inspiration. More about that issue later. In the second place, look at the evidence in Matthew's passages that deal with Peter. And, at least for the time being, keep out of your mind the portrayals of Peter elsewhere in the New Testament. If you had only the Gospel of Matthew, what would you think of Peter?[28]

To Gundry, Matthew alone "exacerbates the denial by having Peter deny before all" who are referenced in Matthew 26:69-75 (cp. Matt. 10:33). Thus, Matthew (really in Gundry's take on Matthew's portrayal of Mark) takes a uniquely contrary position on Peter in contrast to the rest of the portrayals offered in the New Testament. For Matthew, Peter is a false disciple based on Gundry's internal examination of Matthew's Gospel.

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[28]Taken from transcript of Gundry's lecture on October 6, 2014. http://blogs.westmont.edu/2014/09/22/gundry-to-unveil-peter-as-false-prophet/ and You Tube-- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QloN9EuOGXE transcribed and accessed on October 9, 2014.

The Thoughts Behind Gundry's
Thoughts Regarding Peter

Why does Gundry reject so rigorously harmonization? Gundry urges his listeners, "And, at least for the time being, keep out of your mind the portrayals of Peter elsewhere in the New Testament." However, if even slight harmonization be allowed, Gundry's position stands defeated before he has begun. Gundry cites Harold Lindsell's attempt at harmonizing the crowing of the rooster at Peter's denial in the Gospels as evidence for the lack of credibility of harmonization in dealing with Scripture. In other words, Gundry is dismissive of the practice because he cites a few aberrant examples in church history. One should not make a principle of rejection by citing only extremely bad examples of its practice. Such exceptions or bad practice of harmonization does not make a rule to reject its validity. At the same time Gundry tries to defeat the logic of harmonization, he also reveals his own

illogic. Of course, bad examples of harmonization can always be cited, but this does not mean that harmonization is wrong or often effective in dealing with problems from eyewitness accounts as evidenced in the Gospels.

Gundry goes another step further, not only does he reject harmonization but reveals a reason for his bias against it:

> So what about the doctrine of biblical Inspiration, let's admit Matthew's portrayal of Peter disagrees with the portrayals elsewhere in the New Testament. What gives? *Well, there are many similar disagreements in the Bible*. According to Revelation 22:17 for example, a human being who wills to drink the water of life will be saved, but Romans 9:16 says that salvation does not depend on the human being who wills it. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus kept His Messiahship secret from the public until his trial before the Jewish Supreme Court on the very eve of His crucifixion, but in John's Gospel, Jesus broadcasts His Messiahship, His Divine Sonship, His being the I Am before Abraham's lifetime, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Way the Truth and the Life and so on. In public as well as in private

and from the very beginning of His ministry.
*Other examples of disagreement, both
historical and theological, could be
multiplied indefinitely*. What we have to say
is that pastoral, ecclesiastical, evangelistic,
and other authorial purposes often trumped
theological and historical consistency in the
writing of Scripture. In his work called
"Poetics" the ancient Greek philosopher,
Aristotle, defended the rights of poets to
engage factual inconsistencies if those
inconsistencies were necessary to make a
desired point. *In other words, truth is
sometimes, not always, but sometimes, to be
found on a different plane from the factual,
so to in the Bible, if you want to maintain both
a high view of its inspiration and an honest
appraisal of its verbal phenomenon.*[29]

Here Gundry reveals his real beliefs about the inspirational

nature of Scripture, i.e. it contains contradictions "both

historical and theological." Indeed, because it is

contradictory, it cannot be harmonized. For Gundry, only

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[29] Italics and bold added. Taken from transcript of Gundry's
lecture on October 6, 2014.
http://blogs.westmont.edu/2014/09/22/gundry-to-unveil-peter-as-false-
prophet/ and You Tube--
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QloN9EuOGXE transcribed and
accessed on October 9, 2014.

by recognizing these contradictions, both factual and theological, can a "high view of inspiration and an honest appraisal of its verbal phenomenon" be achieved.[30]

Clearly, Robert Gundry's view of inspiration allows for errors and contradictions, both factual and theological. So Gundry's defense of a high view of Scripture's inspiration is to agree that it internally has "factual inconsistencies" in itself! Such a defense is no real defense of Scripture but a subtle, and yet not-so-subtle, undermining of its inspiration and inerrancy, all under the guise of defending it. If this was Gundry's position when he was a member of ETS, one wonders not only what his definition of inerrancy is, but his intellectual honesty in signing the ETS statement of faith. Intellectual honesty would seem to preclude such a signing.

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[30] Taken from transcript of Gundry's lecture on October 6, 2014. http://blogs.westmont.edu/2014/09/22/gundry-to-unveil-peter-as-false-prophet/ and You Tube-- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QloN9EuOGXE transcribed and accessed on October 9, 2014.

Ironically, Gundry's sees his presentation/understanding of Peter in Matthew somehow warns and guards against apostasy by those in the Church. Gundry states, "Finally, because the persecution of Christians is now on the upsurge throughout the world, and therefore the danger of apostasy too, we should take Matthew's portrayal of Peter as a dire warning against apostasy."

In Gundry's logic, all Christians must be willing to die for the testimony of Jesus Christ, remembering Peter who apostatized in Matthew. Yet, his logic escapes us. Why would anyone be willing to affirm a testimony for Jesus Christ under persecution that is based in documents, like the Gospels, which, according to Gundry contain such contradictions that "could be multiplied indefinitely"? Someone would be dying for a witness to Jesus' life and message that was hardly trustworthy in its presentation. Such logic is not only unsatisfying, but truly self-defeating.

Furthermore, Gundry is clearly guilty of selective presentation of evidence to maintain his hypothesis. For example, even Matthew demonstrates that Peter, after his denial, went and "wept bitterly"—"And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly." (Matt. 27:75 cp. Luke 22:62). While the weeping may clearly be interpreted as a sign of remorse and repentance on Peter's part, Gundry will have none of it. Instead, he links Peter's weeping to "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30. Yet, not only is Matthew 27:75 not similar since it only mentions weeping while the others mention "gnashing of teeth," judgment is clearly in the context in other places in Matthew but not in Matthew 27:75!

Another example is Matthew's mention of Judas. Judas' apostasy is frequently connected to betrayal (e.g. Matt. 10:4; 26:14, 25, 47, 49; 27:3), so why does he spare

Peter who also blatantly, and publicly, denied Jesus according to Gundry's hypothesis? Still another example is Matthew 28:16 where Matthew mentions the disciples as "the eleven." Clearly only Judas has been subtracted due to his apostasy and betrayal, not Peter. In 10:2, Peter is given prominence in the list of disciples, mentioned first (cf. Matthew 10:2), so why would an apostate have such prominent mention? Well, of course, Gundry's imagination always supplies an answer. For Gundry, perhaps Matthew wanted to show how great Peter's apostasy was very great. Similar is the logic in Peter's confession. Here Matthew includes high praise for Peter in his answer, regardless of whether Peter is the "rock." Why such great praise for an apostate and false disciple? Judas is never praised in any way like that in Matthew, but Peter is. Hardly indicating Peter was always negative in Matthew's eyes. Matthew gives an honest appraisal of Peter, good and bad, without necessarily at all suggesting apostasy. Supporting this latter

statement is **Jesus'** rebuke of Peter in Matthew 16:22 for saying that Jesus should not suffer the cross. Peter, in Matthew's eyes both fails and succeeds. Instead of viewing him only in a cycloptic, one-eyed view maintained by Gundry, Matthew presents Peter in all his human frailty, good points and bad. Gundry deliberately excludes legitimate evidence internally that **contradicts** his hypothesis, i.e. selective use of evidence to fulfill his prejudice.

Biblical Theology and Redaction Criticism are Central in Gundry's Thinking

Finally, where does Gundry's logic stem from in rejecting harmonization? This **emerges** from two areas, his affirmation of his view of biblical theology as well as redaction criticism, all of which demonstrate that Gundry, in reality, has a low- or no-view of inspiration. The church

throughout its early history, until the 17ᵗʰ century, believed

that the Bible could be harmonized. Even the heretic

Tatian, in his *Diatessaron*, believed so. The traditional

view of harmonization centering in a high view of

inspiration continued through the Reformation and beyond.

MacArthur comments, "A striking phenomenon of the

study of the Bible in the sixteenth century was the sudden

flowering of Gospel harmonies."[31] Those producing these

works had two reasons for composing their harmonies: (1)

to edify the faithful by the presentation of a total picture of

Jesus life and ministry and/or (2) to refute the critics of the

Gospels "by demonstrating the essential and astonishing

agreement of the Gospels."[32] Dungan adds to this, "These

sixteenth- and seventeenth century harmonies share one

significant characteristic: they are without exception

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[31] Harvey K. McArthur, *The Quest The Search for the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Through the Centuries, 1966), 85.

[32] McArthur, *Historical Jesus*, 87.

strikingly literal in their understanding of the Gospel narratives" and "These traditional Gospel harmonies proceeded on the basis of Augustine's assumption that all four Gospels were uniformly true and without admixture of the slightest degree of error. The traditional way of stating this assumption was to claim that each had been written with the aid of the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Christ, so that all four were evenly true in all parts and passages."[33] Importantly, the independence approach identifies itself with this traditional approach to harmonization.

Yet, with the onslaught of historical-critical ideologies, traditional harmonization waned under modern philosophical influences that were inimical to the grammatico-historical understanding of Scripture. During the height of rationalism, deism and the Enlightenment, the traditional high-standard of inspiration associated with Gospel harmonies began to wane. Ephraim Gotthold

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[33] Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem*, 304-305.

Lessing, a Spinozist (rationalist and anti-supernaturalist; see the section under rationalism), published the work *Fragmente eines Ungenannten* ("Fragments by an Unknown Person"—published between 1774-1778),[34] written anonymously by rationalist and deist Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), a personal friend of Lessing. In this work, Reimarus's purpose was to discredit the origins of Christianity. In the fragments, he presented Jesus as an unsuccessful messianic pretender and that the disciples were disappointed charlatans who stole Jesus' body and invented the story of the resurrection in order to

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[34] The work consisted of seven anonymous pieces written by Reimarus, but these seven pieces were a part of a much larger work of Reimarus's*, Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*. A critical edition of this work was published in 1972, see Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*. Im Auftrag der Joachim Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften Hamburg herausgegeben von Gerhard Alexander. 2 vols (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972). See also Colin Brown, *Jesus in European Thought*, 1-6.

start a new religious movement and avoid working for a living.[35]

In the half-century or so that followed the publication of Reimarus' *Fragments*, wildly contradictory hypotheses that deprecated the gospels as to composition and authorship came into print. One of the first scholars to attempt a historical-critical approach to the Scripture was Johann David Michaelis (1717-1791). Michaelis came strongly under the influence of Deism. In 1750 he published his *Einleitung in die göttlichen Schriften des Neuen Bundes*, that constituted a comprehensive presentation of alleged historical problems in the New Testament. Michaelis' work inaugurated the modern "science" of New Testament introduction. Neill and Wright

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[35] This reference has special note to the sixth "Ueber die Auferstehungsgeschichte" ("Concerning the Resurrection Story") and seventh fragment, Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger ("On the Purpose of Jesus and that of his Disciples"). An English translation of the sixth and seventh fragments may be found in *Reimarus: Fragments*. Charles H. Talbert, ed. Ralph S. Fraser, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).

comment "the orthodoxy of the time [Michaelis' day] took it for granted that, because the NT is divinely inspired in every part, it is a priori impossible that there should be any contradictions between the Gospels; any apparent contradiction must be due only to the imperfection of our understanding, and must be susceptible of resolution into harmony. Michaelis was prepared to face the possibility that there really might be contraction."[36] Interestingly, Michealis rejected the idea of literary dependence among the gospel writers, tracing their shared characteristics to their common use of apocryphal gospels that he hypothesized from Luke 1:1.

Eventually, Greisbach came under "the decisive influence"[37] of the skepticism of Micahelis at the University of Halle where Griesbach was his student. From his student days with Semler and Michaelis, Griesbach

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[36] Neill and Wright, 6.
[37] Dungan uses this precise term. See Dungan, 310.

"had been exposed to Europe's skeptical historicist interpretation of the New Testament and Church history."[38] Griesbach's skeptical attitude toward the gospels caused him to reject traditional harmonization of the Gospels. Instead, as noted above, he belied that it was not possible to harmonize the gospels in the way that the church had done throughout its history. Such skepticism caused him to develop a different approach, the synopsis, that placed the gospels not into a harmonious whole but into parallel columns so that minute differences and/or alleged contradictions could stand out sharply and be magnified. In its historical development, therefore, the synopsis is based in historical skepticism regarding the gospels. Also under the influence of Romanticism and its concept of development, Griesbach developed his synoptic approach.[39] Indeed, at the heart of all modern discussion of modern

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[38] Dungan, 311-12.
[39] Dungan, 302-326.

synoptic dependency hypotheses is a "skepticism regarding

the chronological value of the gospels."[40]

Also important is the fact that gospel synopses

played a decisive role in the development of modern

synoptic dependency hypotheses that arose from modern

skepticism regarding the gospels. Both the Two-Source and

Two Gospel hypotheses were greatly facilitated to

prominence through this vehicle. [41] More significantly,

grave suspicion is cast upon any neutrality of synopses in

dealing with the synoptic question. They are circular at

core, being constructed to prove dependency hypotheses

already chosen on an *a priori* basis. Dungan comments that

most modern synopsis are highly biased toward the Two-

/Four-Source hypothesis: "the same circular process of

argument emerged in Germany that later appeared in

England. A source theory was invented and a synopsis

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[40] Dungan, 307.
[41] Dungan, 332-341.

created to illustrate it. Charts were then created based on

that synopsis which were held to 'prove' the theory. This

circulus in probando was camouflaged in Germany by

Huck's claim that his synoptic arrangement was 'neutral"

with respect to all source theories."[42]

In contrast, harmonization of the gospel texts were

based on a traditional view of inspiration. Instead of

skepticism, there is a prevailing optimism regarding the

ability of the gospels to be harmonized historically. While

synopses are not necessarily to be rejected they should be

recognized as highly prejudicial instruments rooted in

skepticism and deliberately designed to promote

dependency hypotheses. A high view of scripture should

reject redactional hermeneutics because it naturally seeks

for theological motivation rather than harmonization, and,

in doing so, has a marked tendency toward dehistoricizing

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[42] Dungan, 336.

the gospels as historical documents.[43] This is clearly

evidenced in Gundry's commentary on Matthew.

Admittedly, at times traditional harmonization has

been done superficially by its practitioners, producing less

than viable solutions to problem passages.[44] Such a

problem, however, centers in the exegete's skill at

harmonizing the text, not in the legitimacy or primacy of

harmonization itself. Proper harmonization takes time,

patience and diligent work upon the part of the exegete.

Suspension of judgment may be necessary until further data

is forthcoming on a particular problem. At no time,

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[43] See Thomas, "Redaction Criticism," in *The Jesus Crisis*, 233-267.

[44] An example of this would be Lindsell who attempted to harmonize the text by assuming six denials; See Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 174-176. In spite of Lindsell's solution, his perception of the problem provokes a correct assessment: "it is plain they were not coached in that testimony, as is also the fact that they testified independently of each other." (p. 176). Lindsell correctly recognized that the existence of this "problem" of harmonization actually constitutes an argument for the accounts being independent rather than stemming from literary dependency. For if the accounts stemmed from one gospel as a source, why did not the gospel writer who used another gospel as the "source" attempt to harmonize his account with his source?

however, if no data resolves the difficulty, is redactional

hermeneutics a legitimate pursuit as Gundry practices since

its natural tendency is to pit one gospel against another or

isolate one gospel's affirmations from another.

One final note should be made on biblical theology

so prominently advocated by Gundry in his presentation.

Gerhard Hasel, in his excellent work, *New Testament*

Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate, presents a

sober assessment of the historical roots of biblical theology,

now practiced by many evangelicals, especially Gundry.

Biblical theology was developed through the influence of

Neologian and rationalist Johann Philipp Gabler (1753-

1826). Gabler, as noted by Hasel,

> [M]arks the beginning of Biblical theology's
> role as a purely historical discipline,
> completely independent from dogmatics . . . .
> (1) Inspiration is to be left out of
> consideration . . . . (2) Biblical theology has
> the task of gathering carefully the concepts
> and ideas of the individual writers, because
> the Bible does not contain the ideas of a
> single man . . . . (3) Biblical theology as a
> historical discipline is by definition obliged

to distinguish between the several periods of
the old and new religion.[45]

In other words, the practice of biblical theology originates

from a low view of Scripture that views competing, often

contradictory viewpoints, among the writers. The true goal

of biblical theology is to contrast and highlight alleged

contradictions between writers, not any harmonization.

Gundry's assertions match this goal well. Whenever

evangelicals practice biblical theology, the danger of

returning to its historical roots of hypothesizing alleged

contradictions between the writers of the NT, especially the

Gospels.

One final note deserves mention. Gundry argued,

In his work called "Poetics" the ancient
Greek philosopher, Aristotle, defended the
rights of poets to engage factual
inconsistencies if those inconsistencies were
necessary to make a desired point. In other
words, truth is sometimes, not always, but
sometimes, to be found on a different plane

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[45] Gerhard Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 22-23.

> from the factual, so to in the Bible, if you
> want to maintain both a high view of its
> inspiration and an honest appraisal of its
> verbal phenomenon.[46]

The present writer finds it very telling that Gundry

compares the Gospel literature to "poetics." Such a

comparison reveals Gundry's true take on the Gospels as

not historical documents but fictionalized material of a

poetic nature. This latter point also reveals why he

dehistoricized so much of Matthew's infancy narratives in

Matthew 1-3. His "midrashic" hypothesis also corresponds

to his take on the "poetic" nature of these accounts. In

contrast, the present writer believes that, as supported by

the whole history of the orthodox church, that the Gospels

are historical narratives of the actual life and ministry of

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[46] Westmont College Blog --
http://blogs.westmont.edu/2014/09/22/gundry-to-unveil-peter-as-false-prophet/ and You Tube
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QloN9EuOGXE&feature=youtu.be
transcribed and accessed on October 9, 2014. All quotes taken from a
transcript of this lecture.

Jesus and corresponds to historical reality. It is not Peter who has apostatized.

Conclusion To The Matter of Gundry

While listening to Gundry's lecture, one is reminded of Luke's characterization of those who assembled at Aereopagus to hear him in Acts 17:21—(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)" Truly, Gundry has obtained the Athenian ideal in his assertions regarding Peter utilizing biblical theology and redaction criticism for his novelty not seen throughout the history of the orthodox church until now.

One final note. Mentoring is important. A privilege exists in teaching future generations of Christian scholars. James reminds us that "teachers have the greater judgment" because they use their tongues to train (James 3:1-5). What we teach students about God's Word has a weighty

judgment for teachers. Tremper Longmann III, who now holds Gundry's chair at Westmont, is also a former student of Gundry's introduces him in the following terms, "Bob is a wonderful defender of our Christian faith but also willing to explore what some people think are controversial issues" and,

> I mean I remember in my early career very early career one of the first evangelical theological societies I went to where his new Matthew commentary was an item of some controversy and discussion and I just am so thankful to be associated with Bob in this Chair because of his honest biblical scholarship as well as his affirmation robust affirmation of Christianity. And Bob taught here at Westmont college for 38 years and he has influenced many many students who have gone on in different careers. This festschrift that was just published by his students and I was privileged to write the preface to it is called *Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament.* And this is an incredibly important topic because often systematic professors and biblical professors kind of war with each other. But Bob has trained his

students to think well about the interrelationship between the two.[47]

Longmann considers Gundry someone who "robustly" defends the faith. One finds that odd since 70% of ETS members requested him to resign for a lack of intellectual integrity in signing the ETS doctrinal statement and then publishing a commentary that dehistoricized the infancy narratives of Matthew, which narratives form a strategic foundation for who Jesus' was and did. What legacy does someone leave to his students who sows doubt into their minds about the trustworthiness of the gospels as historical records of Jesus? I am reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 23:15, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make

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[47] Westmont College Blog -- http://blogs.westmont.edu/2014/09/22/gundry--to--unveil--peter--as--false--prophet/ and You Tube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QloN9EuOGXE&feature=youtu.be transcribed and accessed on October 9, 2014. All quotes taken from a transcript of this lecture.

him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. I am also remind of Paul's Words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Novelty isn't what we should teach future generations of Christians, but faithfulness to the Gospel texts.

Amputees in the Image of God

John D. Ferrer[1]

The Amputation Objection and the Problem of Evil

Amputations—however they may happen—are real pain and suffering. Few dispute this. There is something deeply wrong about them. And they do not seem like the kind of thing to exist in an ideal world. They are as cracks in a theistic world; potential proof of poor craftsmanship. God might not be specifically to blame, but He still seems culpable for letting such natural evils happen on his watch. If God is rightly described with the classical "omnis"— omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent—then the facts of suffering and evil in the world are a real explanatory problem. Of special note are those pointed egregious evils which do not seem attached to any "greater good," that is, gratuitous evils. Cases of apparently "greater good" are

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[1] John D. Ferrer, PhD. Professor of Apologetics at Pantego Christian Academy in Arlington Texas, as well as professor of Ethics and World Religions at Texas Wesleyan University.

hereby excluded, thus leaving out any cases where a soldier

lost a limb by diving on a grenade since that sacrificial act

served to protect his squad, a potentially greater good. Nor

are surgical amputations counted where "life over limb"

logic necessitates severing a limb to halt the spread of

gangrene. Instead, the kind of evil at issue here is that

category of horrendous evil wherein an amputation is

gratuitous, lacking any greater good.[2]

Gratuitous amputations easily fit within the

philosopher's topic known as the Problem of Evil. Simply

phrased the problem of evil says an all-good, all-knowing,

and all-powerful God has the knowledge, means, and

incentive to prevent all evil; yet evil exists, persists even,

and with great quantity. Hence no such God exists.

Modified phrasings of this classic problem include the

problem of suffering and the most prominent and modern

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[2]These "gratuitous amputations" literally lack any greater good. This excludes cases of *apparently* gratuitous evil where they only *seem* to be gratuitous, but in fact are not.

form, the Evidential Argument from Evil. Here the fact of

amputations finds acute expression as *probable* evidence

against a tri-omni God. According to the Evidential

Argument from Evil, there exist evils—such as

amputations—which lack any accessible, discernible, or

demonstrable greater good. These are gratuitous evils. Yet

no such evils would exist if God exists. Hence, God seems

not to exist. Typical Christian theodicies attempt to show

why God allows evil. Meanwhile, "defenses" are more

humbly offered as *merely possible* reasons why God would

allow such evil. Either way, gratuitous amputations, seem

to suggest that God is not doing his job or his desk is

vacant.

Applying the category of gratuitous amputations to

the evidential argument from evil produces what can be

called the Evidential Amputee Objection (EAO). This

paper addresses the EAO. Other kinds of evil might be

susceptible to the defenses offered here, but amputations
are the specific kind of evil in view.

Developing the Evidential Amputee Objection

How might gratuitous amputations pose a problem for
theism? Classical theism postulates a sovereign God who is
in charge of everything from directing the planetary cycles
to counting the hairs on everyone's head, and there would
be no event in nature or choice of man that could surprise
God nor happen without God's action or permission.
Gratuitous evil, if it occurred, would puncture that inflated
theory, reducing it to non-classical theism or non-theism.

Some respected names in Christian thought have
taken that very route, fleeing from classical theism before
the Problem of Evil's frontal assault. The shelter of
classical theism lays abandoned and war-torn, neglected by
so much analytic philosophy. Theologians Bruce Little and
Ron Nash, together with philosophical luminaries like

William Lane Craig and Alvin Plantinga have aligned

awkwardly with open theists such as Greg Boyd and

William Hasker.[3] Odd allegiances, like these, spanning

conservative and liberal camps, might seem striking. But

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[3]Bruce Little, "God and Gratuitous Evil," in *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain* , Chad Meister and James K. Dew Jr., eds. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 38-52. Ron Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderv, 1988), 221. William Lane Craig explicitly denied classical theism in a public interview at Texas A&M University, see "Faith, Science, and Philosophy: An Interview with William Lane Craig," College Station, TX: Veritas Forum at Texas A&M University, 21 March 2013. He has implicitly denied classical theism in "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6. (1989): 172-88. William Hasker and Greg Boyd are well known open theists, thereby denying classical theism, and are widely published on the problem of evil. Alvin Plantinga's *God Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) is considered the touchstone for rebutting the logical problem of evil. In it, Plantinga stumbles into Molinism—wherein God selects from counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, actualizing only some of them in the "real world." And it was the limited options afforded to Him by this counterfactual realm which dictated that any comparable great creation would include evil on par with this world. Plantinga valiantly defends a robust sense of human free will (libertarian freedom), but sacrifices a facet of omnipotence and potentially reinterprets classical creation doctrine. Namely, there exists a realm which is neither God nor God's creation—the counterfactual realm—yet no such realm has metaphysical entrance in classical theism. Concerning omnipotence, counterfactuals represent a logically possible but metaphysically impossible state of affairs. God's omnipotence, then, is curtailed to accommodate logical possibilities that not even God can do. According to Plantinga's free will defense, God cannot, for example, make a world in which Butch refuses to take the.$20,000 bride when offered it.

heavy pressure from the Problem of Evil is just dangerous enough and just drastic enough to force strange alliances.

However, this retreat from the fortified borders of classical theism is, in my view, too hasty. To quote Alvin Plantinga, it is not "warranted." It forsakes much of the refined and distilled work of roughly nineteen centuries of hard fought orthodoxy. It claims that St. Anselm, St. Augustine, and St. Aquinas were all wrong regarding God's nature; their views on God were too far-sighted. The systematic integrity of classical theism is lost for the sake of strengthening defenses on just one of the fronts. Classical theism is left behind as modern trends retreat to Molinism, Open Theism, and Deism. Put another way, they have *conceded* to the problem of evil admitting that evil *does* disprove the all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God.

I do not propose such confrontational claims lightly since these men are all smarter than I; but one need not be

especially smart to have sufficient and compelling reasons to disagree with experts. A full demonstration of their erroneous abandonment of classical theism merits more discussion than this symposium allows. Plus it would be tangential to the ministerial aim of this paper. The main aim here is to give some useful rebuttals to the EAO. To dignify a bit of both of these goals, it is contended here that the EAO need not compel a retreat from classical theism, but can be rebutted instead with a "greater-good" defense, specifically through the doctrine of the *imago dei*. This paper is not an attempt, however, to *resolve* the problem of evil—emotional force and all. Instead, only a partial explanation is offered. It is admitted that academic lectures and papers are thin and flat. They are mere words and paper where shared hugs and helping hands are equally needed.

Gratuitous and Discriminatory Amputation

Some amputations do not immediately seem to threaten

God's character or existence. Customary "greater good

theodicies" can point to greater goods that are readily

visible, for example, in cases of surgical amputation, where

a human life is saved; or in natural consequences where a

person loses a finger doing something ill-advised. These

may threaten God's character at some level, but they are

not the strongest evidence to that effect since they are too

easily identified as traditional greater-goods like free-will,

love, punishment, or the soul-building theodicy (courage,

valor, loyalty, life-saving, etc.).[4]

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[4]The classic work on the soul-building theodicy, A.K.A.: the Irenean Soul-Making Theodicy, is John Hick's *Evil and the God of Love,* (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 1966). Hick resorts to the image of God doctrine considerably in his work, however, he focuses on the development of human character in terms of "christ-likeness." That dimension can be thought of as a facet of the image of God doctrine (a la, John 13:13-17; Rom 8:29; Eph 4:22-24; 1 Pet 2:21). However the emphasis in this paper is the aspect of authority within the *imago dei* passage in Genesis 1:26-28. Man is to represent God to the world by a right exercise of God's delegated authority.

Other cases of amputation, perhaps most cases, are not so easily identified with "greater goods." Certain moral evils (i.e., evil caused by moral agency) are so excessive, malicious, or otherwise devoid of redeeming circumstances that they are *prima facie* gratuitous. Likewise, natural evils (i.e., evil not apparently caused by a moral agent) like birth defects, or degenerative diseases like flesh eating bacteria, or everyday accidents can all incur amputation. These may or may not be "gratuitous" depending on whether they do in fact lack a "greater-good" context.[5]

Amputation however constitutes another problem for theism besides apparent gratuity, namely God can be charged with discrimination. Why does God discriminate

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[5]Of course, there may be "greater goods" which humans cannot or do not know. And that possibility might be reasonably inferred from other evidences, such as the moral argument for God, resurrection apologetics, and fulfilled prophecy in Scripture, even while there is no available evidence for a particular reason behind a particular evil. Arguments addressing such a large-scale topic as "God's existence" can benefit from a bird's eye view, where no single subtopic is allowed to dictate all the philosophical commitments within one's systematic theology.

against amputees such that they are never healed while

many cancer patients, bird-flu victims, and all sorts of other

hurting human beings are cured? "Permanent" ailments like

amputation are never cured, so neither should the

spontaneous recovery of cancer patients or flu victims

count towards divine intervention. Evils, like amputations,

seem less problematic (than at first glance) if there is some

chance for a *Deus Ex Machina* to miraculously intervene

and "rescue" the occasional amputee, as He seems to do for

some cancer patients. But amputees, unfortunately, always

seem to get the shaft, making it unclear that God does in

fact heal cancer patients. Perhaps cancer patients are not

healed by God either; they are healed by natural forces like

medicine, placebo effect, or anomalous recovery.

Otherwise, there should be comparable amounts of healing

among victims of amputation, encephalitis, AIDS or other

"incurables." The discrimination objection effectively

expands the problem of evil by multiplying real suffering

together with apparent injustice and arbitrariness on God's part. God seems all the more unlikely.

This line of objection can be answered by at least four routes. First, the theist may categorize some evils differently from others, with some evils being "curable" through miracles, while other evils fall in a different category of permanence, amputations for example. These permanent features are a kind of unchanging or incurable consequence of evil, an evil of finality where the person's earthly status in that regard is fixed and unchanging.[6] Just as God allows some evils which seem gratuitous but have overwhelming redemptive value apparent only to God, so

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[6]It may be allowed for the sake of argument that "evil" includes most any suffering, loss, sickness, moral error, etc. From a molinist perspective it is coherent to assert that a person's definitive counterfactuals may include permanent features like amputations such that, "Were Butch to become an amputee he will stay an amputee." From a non-molinist perspective there would be no such necessity to anything whatsoever apart from God and His nature, hence any permanent features are either true of God himself (i.e.: as a subset of his immutability) or are chosen and created (i.e.: metaphysically originating in God's knowledge, will, and action).

there may be permanent features which suit God's inscrutable but redemptive plans.

This option is logically and metaphysically possible, though it might not be the most intuitively obvious or compelling route. While this option might seem obscure it is no stretch for Christian theology. It already exists for Christians in the doctrine of "hard heartedness"—such as Pharaoh's willful rebellion—and the "thorn IN the flesh"—as with Paul's mysterious ailment that God refused to heal.[7] Also history is set and unchanging. Any evil historical events would already serve in populating this category. If a person is murdered, that state of affairs becomes a fixed and unchanging point. Sure it is metaphysically coherent to talk about restored mortal life—as in resurrection doctrine—but there has yet to be another documented and corroborated case comparable in

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[7]Rom 9:17-18; 2 Cor 12:7-10

evidential force to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[8]

Likewise, we would consider brain death a permanent

feature, which even classical theists can admit is highly

unlikely to be reversed, even if God were prone to

miraculous healing.

Second, it may be the case that God rarely or never

heals cancer patients too, or encephalitis victims, etc. By

this thought, the cases of "healing" are not in fact healings

but normal results from the range of treatments so far

available. There may or may not be divine intervention, but

if there were, it would not be the sort of noticeable or

natural-law-suspending kind to qualify as "miracles." God

could be involved providentially or not at all, but "healing"

and "miracle" would be overstatements.

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[8]Here modest skepticism is assumed, but it is allowed that the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection is not blind fideism and is defensible as evidenced by the exhaustive work, on the resurrection, by Michael Licona and Gary Habermas. One need not assent to this argument for the Resurrection of Jesus to admit that its evidence base is impressive compared to other similar resurrection claims. Any doctrine of future resurrection (for the rest of mankind) can, here, be saved for another day.

Third, it may be that God *does* heal at least some

amputees—but rarely. There is rare precedent of a healed

amputee in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus healed

the guard's ear overzealously severed by St. Peter (Luke

22:51). More often, it seems that God does not heal

amputees. Rather than intrude extravagantly, God seems to

allow things to "play out" on their own—amputations

included. By a secular interpretation that allowance

indicates divine absence. By a deistic interpretation, that

absence indicates apathy, moral indifference, or even

divine finitude—where He is not able to intervene without

contradicting the self-sustaining mechanics He intends for

the universe. Regardless, God's non-intrusion would seem

to suggest He does not care or God does not exist, either

way, God stays out of it. But the rarity of supernatural

healings need not draw such dire dilemmas. It need not be

divine indifference or unholy absence. It could be the

demure distance of a gentleman. Perhaps God steps aside,

clearing space for people to step in and reflect God as divine image-bearers to the world. This option leads to the next point.

Fourth, it may be that God heals amputees often, but through his Image-bearers. God allows medical doctors and other people to be extensions of his healing presence on earth so that any surgically restored limbs, prosthetics, digit or limb transplants, rehabilitation, and reorientation— all of these can count as an instrumental divine healing where God uses people to achieve his healing work. This brand of healing rarely if ever achieves fully restored function or appearance, but it does not have to do so to effectively soften the force of the EAO.

In the view of this author, all four of these responses have merit. Some evils may be permanent effects, at least as far as medical science allows. God might not be miraculously healing people of other ailments as often as religious claimants may think. At least one or two

miraculous healings have happened for amputees thus

showing that it is not theologically impossible for God,

even if it is rare. And medical practice can be seen as a

spiritually weighted endowment for the purpose of

restoring amputees to functionality in work, at home, and in

the rest of society. Whether the surgery is a digit transplant,

a skin graft, or an implant; medical doctors and any

therapists can administer healing no less meaningfully than

the work of clergy.

Amputees and the Image of God

In addressing the EAO, the *imago dei* ("Image of God")

doctrine—already mentioned—is a biblical option for

appertaining forms of classical theism such as "People of

the Book" (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity). By this

doctrine man is said to be "in God's image" somehow

"reflecting" God by our manner or nature. Emerging from

Genesis 1:26-28, the concept correlates with gender

distinctions,[9] with authority over the earth,[10] and with blessing, procreation, and flourishing.[11] Setting aside disputes over what all is included in the *imago dei* it may be minimally asserted that (1) the *imago dei* identifies man's nature as a reflector-of-God, that is, man is not God nor merely animal, but rather a God-like creature that has been made to point attention back to his Maker; (2) the *imago dei* either is dominion or enables man for some measure of dominion which, either way, alludes to God's innate dominion over creation; and (3) the *imago dei* is not entirely lost since the Fall in Genesis 3.[12]

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[9]"[I]n the image of God he created them, male and female he created them" Genesis 1:27b, ESV.

[10]"[L]et them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth (ibid., 1:26)," and ". . . subdue [the earth] and have dominion over it (1:28b).

[11]"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth'" (1:28a).

[12]The "image" is preserved, at least partially, as suggested by Genesis 5:3; 9:6—both occurring after the effacing of humanity with a sin nature in Genesis 3. See also, 1 Cor 11:7. The aspect of the *imago dei* employed most heavily in this article is the "Dominion View" of the *imago dei* also known as the Socinian View. However, in treating dominion as only *an* aspect of the *imago dei* and not *the* fullness of the

Recapitulating this doctrine, Man is to glorify God by reflecting God's authority through our delegated and reflective authority. Here it will be argued that amputations can be redeemed, in part, by exercising the *imago dei*.[13] Put more forcefully, amputations constitute a means of reflecting God's authority. Exercised rightly, that authority is a good thing. Mankind is endowed with great power over his environment, hence, with great responsibility he goes forth to "subdue" it and have "dominion" over it.

Imago Dei my own view falls more in line with the open view of John Calvin who allows that the *Imago Dei* can mean a whole host of features which man shares with His creator God (see, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* I.15.3-4, Henry Beveridge, trans. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008], 106-7.

[13]I do not address whether the *Imago Dei* is a state, action, or capacity for action. I assume that man *is* in God's image but exercises that nature well or poorly depending on his character and his actions.

Meaningfulness and the Mythical Upper Limit[14]

Broadly framing the EAO is the fact that there is no upper limit to how much suffering can be redeemed through transcendent meaning. The *imago dei* is just that, a doctrine of divine meaning—where humans *mean* something more than pain and pleasure, life or death, self or society. Humans are *meaners* pointing attention back to their source of existence, the Divine authority of life. It is hard to grasp on large-scale how there is no known upper limit to the amount of suffering that can be redeemed through transcendent meaning, but some small-scale illustrations might help.

The pain of child birth is offset by the joy of new life; the exhaustion, injuries, soreness, and abuse suffered in a sport can be outweighed by the joy of competition; and

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[14]The application of meaningfulness to the problem of evil is not original with me. See also, Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1999), throughout.

in the case of amputations, image-bearing humans can still exercise their God-given duties and privileges within greater redeeming contexts. Jacob fathered the twelve tribes of Israel despite his permanent hip injury. Isaac conveyed God's blessings to his children despite his blindness. Even Jesus in the resurrection retained his crucifixion scars suggesting that His glorified body is somehow more perfect with wounds intact.[15]

In the problem of evil broadly, it cannot be emphasized enough that life is about more than pain and pleasure so that boundless depths of meaning can still abide, potentially, drowning out the loudest cries of 'Foul!' It is not pain and suffering that we cannot bear, but *meaningless* pain and suffering. When life is felt or experienced as meaningless then there does not seem to be

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[15]This is not to say that amputees will continue as amputees in heaven. Presumably amputations are not part of our "glorified bodies" (1 Cor 15:42-49), though in this fallen world amputations can be more instrumentally valuable than whole-bodiedness in at least some cases.

any pain or suffering too trivial to ignite a burning sense of

injustice or despair. But when the Christian theist searches

the depths of value and significance in life beyond mere

pleasure, normalcy, or physical wholeness he can find that

there is more to life than this life; he finds hints of life

eternal, the life that is only found in God whom man is to

reflect to the world. This present world order takes on new

significance if the *summum bonnum* is not nature, or part of

nature, but transcends nature. He is God, and He alone is

where our beatitude is found.[16]

Pain, Pleasure and the Problem with the Problem of Evil

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[16]This point is not simply that "Heaven will even the score," though that concept is valid for classical Christian theodicy. Even without considering heaven, amputations can in some cases be redeemed by transcendentally meaningful contexts where one's life and body are theologically significant and not just naturally accident. Moreover, since the kind of God at issue here is that of classical theism, then there is no more valuable being, no conceivably better personage more beautiful or good than God. Hence turning one's attention to Him is no triviality, but is the consuming telos of all creation.

The *imago dei* is a semantic doctrine, that is, it suggests a particular kind of meaningfulness to man. This meaningfulness constitutes an additional dimension for consideration within the problem of evil. It is not enough to find a plethora of painful cases, and assume that that, in itself, threatens classical theism.[17] Classical theism is not built around *pleasure*, much less *man's pleasure*, much less *man's earthly pleasure*. To undermine classical theism in its robust form, one cannot presume a simplistic "pain vs. pleasure-rubric" commonly assumed within the problem of evil. By that rubric, if God is good then man should be pleased, perpetually; if man is not perpetually pleased then there is no good God.

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[17]This is not to say that pain and pleasure are trivial or useless to classical theism, but neither are they the whole picture. Classical theism does have an explanatory problem regarding horrendous evils, great pain and suffering, or apparently gratuitous suffering; but unless the concept of meaningfulness—as suggested in the *imago dei*—is also considered, then the antitheist position is merely a woefully incomplete. For more on the problem of horrendous evil see Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*.

To be sure, refined expressions of the problem of evil avoid this simplistic hedonistic characterization. But several tendencies in modern scholarship suggest this view aptly describes much modern thought on the problem of evil, and thus, the EAO. One such trend is that of hedonistic ethical systems such as Desirism, Utilitarianism, and Egoism which are as popular as ever. In those systems "the good" generally equates to "pleasure."[18] Also, neurological trends in psychology tend to reduce mental states to brain states (mind-brain identity theory) and thus abstract states such as joy and suffering, fulfillment and discontent, meaningfulness and meaninglessness, are thereby pressured towards reinterpretation as objectively measurable data, namely, physical pain and physical

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[18]This is not to say that these ethical systems all treat "good" in terms of "physical pleasure." Other kinds of pleasure may be allowed, but in stretching the term beyond its physical sense the term risks overlapping with things that are not particularly "pleasant" such as a sense of meaningfulness, accomplishment, duty (etc.) about one's self on mile 13 of a marathon. The desirable features of that run can be called "pleasure" metaphorically not literally.

pleasure. Pain and pleasure receptors with their chemical equivalents are much more quantifiable than "joy" or "suffering." Furthermore, the shift from the logical problem of evil to the more recent evidential argument from evil implies a shift from abstract "evil" to concrete "pain," hence implying that pain and pleasure are close-enough approximations of "evil" and "good" that they are usefully interchangeable.

Listeners who buy into this hedonistic rubric have already stepped outside of a biblical theistic worldview—it should not be surprising when such people abandon God-belief. *That* kind of God never existed, and the real fact of pain and the absence of pleasure are easy defeaters for Santa God. But this hedonistic framing, is not as big a problem for theism proper, as it is for the problem of evil itself. Numerous Biblical and otherwise theistic notions point out a deeper richer portrait of man and nature than simply "the pursuit of pleasure." There is beatitude, there is

obedience, there is charity, there is martyrdom, there is the *Imago Dei*, and all of these elucidate how man can *mean* something far bigger than simply pain or pleasure.

The doctrine of the *imago dei* points out an overarching purpose for man where pleasure is not the main objective but rather a correlate or effect of a bigger objective. Pleasure is not outlined, explicated, nor necessarily alluded to in the *imago dei*. Presumably people have some improved chance of "fun" or "happiness" in living out their purpose in life, and these would be "pleasant," but pleasure can be distinguished from other concepts such as "flourishing," "well-being," "*beatitude*," or "*eudaimonia*" which affirm higher values than mere "pleasure."[19] Take "flourishing" for example. A person

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[19]"Pleasure" is a restrictive term for its vagueness. If pleasure is stretched so widely as to include all "contentment," "happiness," "joy," "that-which-is-desired," "beatitude," "fun," "delight," "meaningfulness," "eudemonia," etc. then most all morality is but shades of hedonism. But this expansion is unhelpful, since there are valuable states of being which have no particular "pleasure" to them. In writing this paper right now, I want to be here, but I have no physical

may flourish for a length of time yet only experience pleasure sporadically during that time. Or, a person may experience pleasure without flourishing, or flourish with only a latent and future pleasure to look forward to amidst his present hardship.

In the *imago dei* flourishing is the more suitable concept such that people are to, "be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28).[20] The *imago dei* speaks more to meaningfulness than to mere pleasure. If man does or is supposed to reflect God as His image, then man is a symbol of a different realm. Human nature points to supernature.

"pleasure" nor "pain" consciously occurring in my being. Rather it is the abstract, conscious awareness that "I want to be here writing this" which would have to be called "pleasure." But to call this state "pleasure," is not how I feel now. My state is better described as "contentment" and the reason for that contentment is that I see my work as having existential relevance, a kind of meaningfulness tied into my reason for being alive, namely to point out truth, to bless others, and to glorify God. I take all of these pursuits to be expressions or implications within the *imago dei*. I have full confidence that my pleasure will result from all of those things but neither do I do those things to get pleasure. Meaning is the motivation, pleasure but an accident.

[20]I do not distinguish whether man's flourishing is an effect of the *imago dei*, a component of the *imago dei*, or identical with the *imago dei*. That nuance is outside the purview of this paper.

Man is a sign of God. Sure, pleasure is liable to arise when people exercise their purpose, but that does not mean that pleasure is the highest value, the defining feature of goodness, nor the most rightful pursuit. Retooling ethics hedonistically flattens out the complex landscape of ethics, reinterpreting man in animalistic terms where "flourishing" is extruded from any teleological purpose in man, any divine intention for man, and all that is left to pursue is pleasant feelings just like the animals.[21]

Factoring the *imago dei back* into the EAO exposes new depths where pleasure is not the highest value. Amputees have obviously known pain and suffering, but they still may have access to that meaningfulness for which people are made, and so they can have an overall better life

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[21]Utilitarian John Stuart Mill attempts to distinguish "quality" of pleasure from Jeremy Betham's "quantity" rubric. But the further removed he gets from a strictly physical description of "pleasure"—as Bentham would have it—the less his sense of "pleasure" looks distinct from other categories such as "contentment," "fulfillment," or "peace." In other words, Mill uses "pleasure" so loosely that hedonism morphs into a hodgepodge of virtue ethics, ethics of care, or any number of other systems ascribing moral value to non-physical pleasure.

than the whole-bodied playboy gallivanting across the globe with inherited wealth, numbed by abundant pleasures. Where meaning matters (or can matter) more than pleasure, the EAO must be reworked to account for more than just gratuitous pain. The antitheist must show that cases of pain not only fail to have redemptive pleasures tied to them, but all other redemptive contexts must likewise fail as well, including the whole spate of ethical options such as flourishing and meaningfulness. For pain to be gratuitous it must separate the individual from greater meaningful contexts where higher goods outweigh lost pleasure. The problem with the problem of evil, then, is its tendency to mistake pleasure for the highest good. The *imago dei* doctrine talks past hedonism, to a teleological worldview, where people are put on earth *for* a given purpose/s established by God. Pleasure, health, or physical wholeness can occur for the faithful but so can pain, sickness, or amputation, all without prohibiting

participation in the *imago dei*, and all without having to rob the amputee of redemptive meaning or flourishing.

Amputees In the Image of God

The *imago dei* is not a physical form, since God is spirit (John 4:24). So, it is possible (all else being equal) for people to bear His image while lacking in normal physical form. In this case, the amputee still can bear the *imago dei*, still can exercise a degree of dominion over the earth, still manifest fruitfulness and flourishing. Even while admitting the real loss amputees experience, there remain limitless realms of redemptive value which might counterbalance it.[22]

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[22]Notice, this point is not that a neo-natal amputation, for example, is excused if that person gets some good result like an eventual job as mayor, or a big family. The ends do not justify the means; that would fall into the utilitarian fallacy. Utilitarian ethics does not require a dilemma context, and utilitarian ethics allow the "means" to be ethically neutral *until* the results are in. What I propose here is that some finite goods are genuinely good but only occur, or best occur (relative to certain persons) in correlation with real evils. Amputation as such is still evil, but in dilemma contexts amputations are not "as

In this *imago dei* defense one need not argue that the various evils of the world, such as amputations are the only way to bring about comparable goods. Rather, the argument can be that amputations are a kind of obstacle to God-like authority that man would not otherwise encounter, yet that obstacle makes for one more way that God's authority is manifest. When the anti-theist objects to God's goodness because God allows amputations, consistency demands he also object to man's goodness for allowing it too—since man is supposed to be a delegate authority of God. Likewise, when man helps to heal amputations through surgery, prosthetics, and therapy God can likewise

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such" but would be component of complex moral events. Amputations, like all real-world moral judgments should be considered in light of moral events. "Moral event" is my own term for any event of moral weight such that various aspects are liable to contribute morally including aspects like the act itself, the active agent, the character or virtue involved, the motivations, the means, the manner, the results, and other contextual cues. Treated as a moral event, amputations would only be justified if done ethically—such as from good intentions, in dilemma contexts, to avoid greater evil, to serve a greater good, etc. Amputations which serve to save a life, or preserve freedom from tyranny, for example, are regrettable but good.

be glorified and his goodness recognized. Man's limited but real authority over ailments is an extension of God's authority according to the *imago dei*.

Presumably, man is to reflect God to the world because it is good for God to have delegate authorities bearing His image in their representative rulership. Yet man would hardly understand or appreciate that rulership unless there is at least an analogous experience of it. God rules over a *fallen* world, a world that can say, "No Thanks," a world that can usurp authority, ignore her maker, defy conscience, and indulge various limitations in all their mortal inglory.[23] The scene is akin to teenagers disrespecting and rejecting parental authority until they try

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[23]One may object that God did not have to create. This is true but hardly resolves the problem of how God is to share His creative goodness—and it is good to share goodness—without creating. And by order of necessity, it is impossible for God to create a being that is infinite. In creating limitations, there is necessarily less good occurring in creation than exists in the creator. It is not enough to point out "less good" and fault that as "bad." Less good is still good, and fitting for an all-good God.

their own hand at parenting. Now God could bring about

comparable goods without including amputations (or

similar evils).[24] But would man have then encountered the

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[24]This claim runs contrary to the views of Alvin Plantinga and others. As alluded to in the introduction, I object to Plantinga's molinist treatment of the problem of evil, yet not for metaphysical or logical problems per se but for theological objections. In the book *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Plantinga proposes that there are logical possibilities that not even God can do. This view redefines "omnipotence" for Plantinga God, and clearly distinguishes His brand of theism from classical theism wherein God is understood to be able to all that is logically possible. Because it is logically possible to create a world where "Jack takes a $20,000 bribe" then God can do that, never minding what Molinism suggests. In Plantinga's view, God's omnipotence is vastly limited, since he proposes logically coherent states that God cannot achieve. Some "rule" or counterfactual realm dictates that limit to God. And an externally limited God is neither infinite nor omnipotent. Second, classical theism embraces creation *ex nihilo* wherein everything that exists is either God or God's creation, but since molinism touts a realm of "middle knowledge" that is not God's nature or creation, then molinism lies outside of classical theism. Third, molinism posits a realm of middle knowledge wherein there is no grounding in God's nature or God's creation (i.e., the grounding problem), hence there is no causal grounding to give that realm existence whereby that "knowledge" could have truth-makers; hence middle knowledge is not even knowledge. And fourth, molinism does not solve the freedom vs. foreknowledge dilemma it was originally developed to solve. Namely, people's choices are not dictated by God but by counterfactual and future- factual "woulds" in the realm of middle-knowledge. But neither are those "woulds" dictated by us since we do not exist as such in that realm. Hence, we are just as deterministically coerced in molinism as we are in theological determinism, only the "determiner" is a mysterious formal realm of "middle knowledge" wherein God chooses which of those counterfactuals to actualize in the created world. Ever since Plantinga's monumental work, however, the more fashionable contemporary

same variety of assaults on God's authority where God's victorious glory reigns supreme and redeems that evil for God? Surely not. Would the good of God's reflected authority be experienced profoundly without our knowing what it is like to rule over a discordant world, rebellious bodies, and fallen wills, still no.

The *imago dei* entails comparable settings for demonstrating God's authority through man's leadership, and amputations are just one means of paralleling those two roles. God rules over a rebellious created order even embracing a self-limiting form because of the Fall of man. Jesus "amputated" far more than a set of limbs when He suspended divine omnipotence to make "himself nothing,

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phrasing of the problem of evil has been the Evidential Argument from Evil (EAE) made famous by William Rowe and later by Daniel Howard-Snyder, see, William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979), 335-41; and "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," in Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, (Indiana University Press, 1996), 262-85.

taking on the form of a servant, being born in likeness as a man" (Phil 2:7).

Goodness and Governance Recapitulated

Several goods can be proposed or implied in relation to the *imago dei*. First, the gift of governance is good. It is good to be endowed with privilege and opportunity, as that endowment constitutes trust, honor, and affirmation. In this case, the gift is governance via the *imago dei*. And whatever else we know about mankind, it is widely admitted that man needs some sort of governance— minimally involving self-governance, but also allowing for family, community, local, city, state, and federal governance. Strict anarchism is not a likely or realistic candidate though it is not entirely unheard of among serious political thinkers. Some sort of governance is fitting lest the good of man's collective free-will devolves into a Hobbesian "state of nature." Moreover, if humans have governance over humans then there is peer representation

and equity is thought to be more likely when there is a "jury of our peers" or "no taxation without representation."[25] Thus it is good to have the gift of governance.

Second, it is good that God's authority be manifested to the world. The demonstration of God's authority gives cause for worship, and if God is the definitive beauty (as classical theism asserts) then it is a pleasurable good to focus one's attention, in worship, toward God. Moreover, worship of God is also good in the sense of ontological rightness—God, if he exists, would be the most important being, hence attributing worth to Him is simply correct.

Third, it is good that man understand his God, in part, by attempting to exercise God's delegated duties in

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[25]No case is made here for particular governmental structures be it leftist or right wing, whether monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy. I do however commend a "representational" government as in a republic. But, in principle, there are numerous "healthy" options of governance available given different contexts.

the world. Man would seem to have some big shoes to fill.

Yet that is precisely what the *imago dei* has done to man;

God has commissioned man to conduct some of God's

duties, but as delegated authorities on earth, reflecting

God's more rightful and supreme authority. Man's exercise

of dominion thus becomes a sort of representational art

Fourth, building on the previous point about

"meaningfulness," bodily wholeness is not the highest

value. There are such goods that even sacrificing a limb

could be worthwhile. Stated another way, for amputation to

function as a simple defeater for theism, it would have to be

of such negative value that it defies redemption. Yet such

irredeemable evil is impossible (or at least difficult) to

achieve unless bodily wholeness were of the highest value

(or tied for the highest value). From a biblical perspective,

there are some goods worthy of a sacrificed limb. Matthew

18:8, for example says, "If your hand or your foot causes

you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better

for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two

hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire"

(NASB).[26]

Fifth, like other phrasings of the problem of evil,

the EAO errs for thinking, "I wouldn't have done it this

way," is a strong objection. That is, man in his presumed

ability for governance, says if there is a God, and God has

allowed for great evil in this world up to and including

unhealed amputation, then He is evil or false since "I would

have done things differently." While this line of objection

flies in the face of the Inscrutibility Defense, it is not

entirely off target either.[27] People can discern justifying

principles of action, reasoned objections, and can discern

between better and worse behaviors. But this very line of

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[26]Matthew 18:8 may be read as literal instruction or figurative illustration; either way, the point remains that heaven (or at least the avoidance of hell) is of such great value that sacrificing a limb could be justified.

[27]Stephen Wykstra's, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," and Robert Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," both in Daniel Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (1996).

objection implies something of what the *imago dei* doctrine predicts, namely, that people can govern vast domains. People can imagine what it would be like to govern whole planets or a universe (though, I suspect we cannot imagine it very well). What people cannot imagine, however, is everything that God knows such that our thought experiment is informed comparably to God's actual governance.

Of course we do have reason to object to amputations. But our objection to God's manner of governance either risks presuming too little of him or too much of us. God would be sovereign over the whole world, not just of the particular amputees we have in view. God would be aiming at exceedingly good ends, not just immediate, trivial or small-scale goods that people can conceive. God would know the end results of all past, present, and future acts. Given God's exceptional standing, He can still work inscrutably in transcendental and

abundantly good ways directing all creation towards supremely good ends even through evil (such as amputations).[28]

Put another way, our outrage over this chapter in the middle of the book is because we cannot see how the story ends. Were this chapter, by itself, the whole story then our outrage might be justified. But since past chapters (including miracle history—resurrection included), and present chapters (including revelational history—Bible) point to a much bigger better story than nature alone can dictate, then we have reason to believe that our present understanding and experience of amputations can play a part in greater goods by the end of the book.

Sixth, and finally, traditional theodicies and contemporary defenses help explain at least some cases of amputation. Traditional theodicies include, free-will, character formation, and punishment. Contemporary

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[28]Ibid.

defenses include the natural law defense (Van Inwagen),
and the inscrutability defense (Wykstra).[29] Even in cases of
apparently gratuitous evil, there might be a more poignant
choice, virtue, or bit of justice at work which is inscrutable
to mere mortals.

Conclusion

Amputations do not defeat classical theism, but neither are
they any great gift to Christian theology. God-belief is not
easy. A biblical worldview is taxing and tough. Of all the
strengths of a Christian worldview, accounting for
amputations is not among them. Amputations can seem
gratuitous and proposing that a given case is indeed
redeemed in the bigger picture requires some measure of
faith; but, given the *imago dei* doctrine coupled with
traditional theodicies, and a spate of contemporary

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[29]Peter van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, The Problem of
Air, and the Problem of Silence," in *Evidential Argument from Evil*;
Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseum Arguments."

defenses, Christian theism stands vindicated as an informed, plausible, and defensible account for evils in the world. Amputations would seem altogether irredeemable if life is just about pleasure, if meaningfulness did not matter much, and if our judgment of how to run things is broadly reliable on a cosmic scale. Pleasure, however, is merely one facet of life. Our administrative ability is quite finite. And meaningful contexts can exist such that transcendent meaning rules over and crowds out normal trivial pursuits, terrestrial expectations, and pleasure ethics. There is great redemptive meaning to life where human beings press through pain, power through loss, and overcome infirmity to reflect that extra length of God's authoritative glory to the world, the glory of the *imago dei*. Though we would never volunteer to be amputees displaying such things, they are still greater goods. There exist complex goods to where even the resurrected form of Christ kept his crucifixion scars intact.

History and Religion

Michael Harbin[1]

Introduction

While it is debated as to whether the United States was founded as a Christian nation, there is no question but that the vast preponderance of settlers for the first century of our national existence (as well as the earlier colonial period) were from the Judeo-Christian tradition (and almost exclusively from the Christian portion of that tradition). So, while America has long been characterized as a melting pot, for most of its history there has been a substantial degree of religious homogeneity despite a wide spectrum of various ethnic elements.[2] As a result, while Americans were aware that there were other religions, for the most part this would have really only affected people who traveled

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[1]Michael Harbin, Th.D. Chair, Biblical Studies, Christian Education, and Philosophy Department at Taylor University.

[2] David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth: Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 21-52.

abroad. Unless an individual lived in specific areas of certain cities, it was unlikely that he or she would ever encounter a Muslim mosque, or a Buddhist temple, or a Hindu shrine without leaving the country.

The past half century or so has been a very different story. Immigration has brought in increasing numbers of adherents to other world religions, and as a result we now find enclaves of different religions not only in the largest cities, but also in many medium sized towns. Places of worship have followed, and it is not unusual to find mosques, temples, and shrines even in such "middle America" cities such as Indianapolis. As a result, it is increasingly likely that any American knows, works with, or even lives near individuals from a variety of different religious backgrounds.

Coupled with this growth, since the 1960's we have been going through a cultural transition sometimes called "Post-modernism." A key component of this is

characterized by what is called "multi-culturalism" with a basic tenet of tolerance for other beliefs. Unfortunately, the concept of tolerance has taken on political overtones which transcend accepting the individual as he or she is. Rather, the pressure is to grant those beliefs status as truth.

This is evident in how world religions are taught. For example, Segal and Oxtoby note: "Many who take a favourable (sic) view [of religion] regard all or most of the world's religious traditions as more or less equal in value. Some . . . would go so far as to say that all the world's religious traditions teach essentially the same things."[3] If that were the case, the value of one religion over another would seem to be just a matter of personal preference. But, if that were so, then one might ask, why is there so much religious conflict? (Or course one could also ask a similar question about many other areas of life, even in terms of

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[3] Willard G. Oxtoby and Alan F. Segal, editors, *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

allegiance to sports teams–but that is another issue.)

Corduan argues that while there are common threads, there is a crucial distinction between Christianity and the rest of the world religions in terms of the "utter preeminence of Jesus Christ."[4] Given the claims that Jesus made, this is an essential starting point. Our problem today is how do we evaluate those claims? In other words, how do we (or even do we) evaluate the various religions and chose one, or if we have one how do we defend it?

In 1990, as a result of my status as a Naval Reserve officer, I was working with the Commander of the U.S. Seventh Fleet in Japan on a special project. During my off-duty hours I began studying Buddhism and Shinto. After Iraq invaded Kuwait, we steamed to Bahrain, where my job changed in preparation for what became the First Gulf War. Now in my off-duty hours, I began studying Islam. The

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[4] Winfried Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 11.

result of those studies ended up as a history of religion published later, and subsequently to my teaching world religions courses at two different institutions. One of the most significant points I discovered during that several year research process was that of all of the world religions I studied, only two even *claimed* to be based on historical events. I have come to the conclusion that this significant fact provides an entree into the issue of religious truth. However, I have also discovered there is a lot of confusion regarding the matter. For example, when I present this material to my students, they almost invariably suggest that the two historical religions are Christianity and Islam. However, as we examine the evidence (as will be done below), they agree with me that the correct response should be Christianity and Judaism. In contrast, every other world religion is based on unsupported assertions of its founder. While this raises some very interesting implications regarding how we might approach the issue of religious

truth, it is first important that we evaluate the validity of this claim. To do this, we will look briefly at major world religions, focusing on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam to evaluate their foundations. We will then look at Judaism and Christianity and contrast their foundations. After this we will evaluate the implications.

Hinduism and Its Founders

While some scholars maintain that Hinduism is "the oldest of the world's living religions,"[5] this is based on two assumptions that are questionable at best. The first assumption is that since Hinduism developed out of the religion of the Aryan tribes which invaded the Indus Valley region in the early second millennium BC, Hinduism itself can be traced back to that time.[6] However, that ignores the

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[5] D. S. Sarma, "The Nature and History of Hinduism," in Kenneth W. Morgan, *The Religion of the Hindus*, (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1953), 3.

[6] Louis Renou, *Hinduism*, (New York: George Braziller, 1962), 16.

tremendous changes that took place during the millennium after that invasion. The reality is that the major beliefs of Hinduism really did not emerge until about the sixth century BC.[7] The second assumption is that the modern critical theory which dates the origin of Judaism and the writing of the Pentateuch to the sixth century BC is valid.[8] However, that dismisses the Exodus and all that was involved with that event, which we will address below.

Classical Hinduism developed over the centuries through a process that is largely unrecorded. Some of the developments seem to have been in response to various social pressures that derived out of the Aryan conquest. Other developments seem to reflect attempts to reform the system. Many factors from both the Aryan invaders and the conquered Dravidians combined to produce what became

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[7] Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 57.
[8] Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, 267-70.

Hinduism,[9] but perhaps the most significant were three main collections of literature that were written largely anonymously.

The oldest collection is that of the Vedas dating to the second millennium BC. The Vedas consist of four sections: The *Rig Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, and the *Atharva Veda*. The oldest section is the *Rig Veda* a collection of 1028 poems which are hymns addressed to the principal gods of the Aryan pantheon.[10] The *Sama Veda* is a selection of excerpts from the *Rig Veda*, apparently designed to assist in the performance of sacrificial rituals. The *Yajur Veda* contains the sacrificial rituals or formulas. This Veda lacks the rhythmic nature of the first two Vedas.

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[9] Michael A. Harbin, *To Serve Other Gods,* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 99-101.

[10] Gaurinath Sastri observes that the *Rig Veda* mentions a total of 33 gods, with most of the hymns focusing on Agni, Indra, and Soma. He seems to indicate that other gods are implied, but then argues that all are manifestations of the three key gods who rule the three realms, earth, air, and sky (*A History of Vedic Literature*, [Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1982], 36-55).

About half of the material is taken from the *Rig Veda*. The *Atharva Veda* is a collection of poetry from the priestly class. It consists of prayers or hymns, some of which have a magical character. The focus of this Vedic religion was on sacrifice.[11]

The second body of literature significant for Hinduism is the *Brahmanas*. This collection of writings from the priestly class (brahmins) delineated the Vedic ritual, especially the sacrifices. They also changed the value of the ritual from a means of expressing a request to a god (which may or may not be honored) to a process where the efficacy of the ritual depended on the skill of the priest who performed it, thus enhancing the position of the priestly class.[12] While their date is unclear, the fact that Buddhist texts show familiarity with them would suggest a date prior

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[11] Renou, *Hinduism*, 21-25.

[12] It seems likely that this situation is what led to several reformation movements which included Buddhism, Jainism, and actually Hinduism itself as a reaction to the other two.

to the sixth century BC.[13]

The final and probably most important body of literature was *The Upanishads* (in essence, meaning secret teachings).[14] They explain the Vedas and delineate the teachings which became classical Hinduism. It is their composition, which probably began about 600 BC, that is generally viewed as the formation of Hinduism.[15] The number written is unknown but currently 108 survive. Of these, 10-13 are accepted by all Hindus as revealed writings. The *Upanishads* were completed by about 300-200 BC.[16]

It is in the *Upanishads* that we first encounter key

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[13] Sastri, *A History of Vedic Literature*, 105-6. He notes that there is no indication that the Brahmanas have any familiarity with Gautama the Buddha.

[14] Swami Nikhilananda notes that according to certain teachers, it means sitting at the foot of a teacher and listening to his words, which in essence means secret teaching (*The Upanishads*. [New York: Harper and Row, 1964], 383).

[15] Renou states that the Upanishads "show a discrete beginning for Hinduism" (*Hinduism*, 27).

[16] John B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956), 128.

aspects of the religion we know as Hinduism. Probably the key innovation is the concept of karma and reincarnation. According to this concept (which developed in parallel with the caste system), human beings are born over and over. The status of the new life is dependent upon the accumulated moral quality of the previous lives (karma).[17]

Modern Hinduism has added a number of other literary works including the *Sutras* which provided guidance on how to perform various rituals, and later several epics including the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad-gita* (which focuses on Krishna). The Sutras were written between the Upanishads and the epics which were written in the first and second centuries AD. These epics have been a major influence in popular Hinduism.

Tracing this very complex development suggests that Hinduism is a combination of traditions and

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[17] Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, 86-90 and Noss, *Man's Religions*, 126-140.

innovations, which in turn became traditions. The various written authorities for Hinduism are the teachings of the priestly class rather than those of a specific teacher. What is clear is that there is no historical event which is the foundation of the religion. Rather, its antecedents were worship of Varuna who is characterized as the creator and guardian of cosmic law.[18] Some have suggested that this points back to an original monotheism which later developed into an increasing polytheism.[19] In any regard, over the centuries, it has added new written teachings which have greatly changed its character, and added so many new gods that today it is estimated that it includes hundreds of millions.[20] Hinduism as we know it can be dated to not much earlier than the fifth century BC, and it is on the basis of those essentially anonymous writings that

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[18] Harbin, *To Serve Other Gods,* 99-100.
[19] Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths*, 43; Harbin, *To Serve Other Gods,* 112, fn 5.
[20] Harbin, *To Serve Other Gods,* 110.

Hinduism builds its truth claims.

Buddhism and Its Founder

Buddhism was basically an attempt to reform the brahminic religion which later became Hinduism. Its founder was Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as "the Buddha" after his "enlightenment." The little that is known about his early life is based upon oral tradition which was not written down until at least 250 years after his death and which focused on his teachings rather than events in his life. Rockhill observes "two periods of the life of Gautama are narrated by all Buddhist authors in about the same terms (probably because they all drew from the same source for their information), the history of his life down to his visit to Kapilavastu in the early part of his ministry, and that of the last year of his life."[21]

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[21] W. Woodville Rockhill, *The Life of the Buddha and the Early History of His Order*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner, and Co., 1884. Reprint edition, Petaling Jaya: Mandala Trading, 1987), vii.

The gist of these accounts is that he was born into the ruling family of his region and was the heir of the local raja (or prince). Local seers told his father, Suddhodhana, that Gautama would end up in one of two careers: a world class emperor ruling over vast realms, or an enlightened religious leader. Suddhodhana resolved that it should be the former and raised his son accordingly. The traditions maintain that Gautama was raised in a hedonistic lifestyle, with special efforts expended to make sure that he never saw a diseased person, an aged person, a dead person, or a wandering monk. At age sixteen, he was married to a beautiful wife, Yasodhara, through whom he later had a son. While the raja's efforts were successful for several years, at the age of twenty-nine Gautama was allowed to travel through the realm that he anticipated ruling. Despite the efforts of his father, during this trip he saw for the first time disease, old age, death, and wandering monks. Subsequently, after thirteen years of hedonism, he

abandoned his wife, his son, and his future throne and set out to be an ascetic.

For the next six years Gautama wandered as a monk through the Ganges valley seeking answers to the issues of life. He sought out religious teachers as well as practiced meditation and a wide variety of ascetic practices to an extreme.[22] At the end of that period, he realized his efforts provided no solution so Gautama abandoned his extreme fast, gathered his strength and retreated to the roots of the Bodhi tree.[23] For a week, he sat there in meditation. The tradition is that during the full moon of either April or May of his 35th year (528 BC), Gautama was "enlightened," and

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[22] As Khantipalo puts it, "He lived in fearful wilds among the corpse-fields or in dirty places; he refused to wash and wore no clothes; he lived baked by the summer sun in the day and frozen cold in thickets during winter nights; and he lived on minute amounts of food, systematically starving himself until his fine, once regal, body was reduced to mere skin and bone" (Bhikkhu Khantipalo, *Buddhism Explained: An Introduction to the Teachings of the Lord Buddha,* [Bangkok: Mahamkut Rajavidyalaya Press, 1989], 11).

[23] The term Bodhi tree means "tree of enlightenment." Traditionally, the type of tree has been viewed as a variety of fig called pipal (*Ficus religiosa*) which is similar to a banyan tree.

became "a" or "the" Buddha.[24]

At this point it is key to observe that Gautama had been born and raised in a religion that was in the process of becoming what we call Hinduism.[25] As such, he accepted without question many of the foundational beliefs of that religion. These include a very basic premise that an individual dies and is reborn with his rebirth "body" determined by his behavior in the previous life; the idea that the physical world is illusion or *maya*; and that true reality is what is deemed *Brahman* or the universal soul, as opposed to the perceived reality, *Atman*, the individual soul. According to this belief, the individual soul goes through a process of rebirth or transmigration until the point of enlightenment, or re-unification with the universal

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[24] Buddha is a title meaning "enlightened one." One of the items of controversy between the various schools of Buddhism is who might become a buddha. At the time of his assumption of this title, the concept was well known, and more than one skeptic asked if Gautama had become *a* buddha (italics mine). (David Bentley-Taylor and Clark B. Offner, "Buddhism," in Norman Anderson, *The World's Religions*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 179-189).

[25] Harbin, *To Serve Other Gods,* 124-125.

soul (a state called nirvana). Since he accepted the rebirth

process without question, his quandary was how then to

stop this process of rebirth. He emerged from his

meditations with what are called the Four Truths. The first

is that the world is a place of suffering. His second truth is

that the origin of suffering is craving or desire (which is

then the cause of the rebirth process or reincarnation).

Therefore, he concluded (the third truth) the way to

eliminate suffering is to eliminate craving or desire. To this

end, Gautama developed an eightfold path of self-discipline

(the fourth truth).[26] After his enlightenment, Gautama

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[26] H. W. Schumann, *The Historical Buddha*, (London: Arkana, 1989), 61-67. Succinctly, the steps in this path are:
> 1. Right understanding–the individual should accept Buddha's philosophy and reject other, countering philosophies.
> 2. Right desires–the individual should reject such desires as lusts, and resolve to desire only the highest goals.
> 3. Right speech–the individual should be truthful and gentle in his speech.
> 4. Right conduct–the individual's actions should reflect his goals. This includes abstention from killing any living being, from stealing, and from unlawful sexual intercourse.
> 5. Right mode of livelihood–the individual should avoid any work which produces luxury or harms any living thing. He should strive to use his talents and be useful to his fellow man.

began to teach his conclusions or *dhamma* to mankind.

Gautama's enlightenment draws directly from his experiences of extreme hedonism and extreme asceticism. His conclusion is called the "middle way" because it is the way between those two extremes. This is the essence of Buddhism, and is a logical conclusion that any teacher could have reached. The validity of Buddhism lies primarily in the first three truths. Most people would agree that the world is a place of suffering. But the second and third truths raise significant questions. Is the origin of suffering desire? From a Christian perspective, there is a degree of truth to this since desire led to the Fall of Adam

6. Right effort–the individual should strive to avoid evil, to overcome evil, to inculcate good habits within himself, and to maintain those good habits already present. The ultimate goal is universal love.
7. Right awareness–the individual should be aware of the transitory nature of the body, of the feelings of others, the mind, and focus on completely mastering his own mind.
8. Right concentration–the individual should learn to concentrate on a single object, thus demonstrating the mastery of the mind.

and Eve. But, while desire could be another way of

describing the self-centeredness of fallen human beings, the

concept of sin goes much further incorporating moral

issues, depravity, and actual guilt.[27] Further, the idea that

this leads to reincarnation is an assumption that Gautama

brought forth from his proto-Hindu background. Is the

solution then to eliminate desire? While logical, one must

question whether it is possible since at least some desire

derives from physical needs.[28] But all that we have is the

assertion from Gautama that it is possible and that his

eightfold path is the means by which it can be done.

Islam and Its Founder

It is commonly known that Islam dates its founding and its

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[27] Ted M. Dorman, *Faith For All Seasons*, second edition (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 123-133.

[28] In this regard it is interesting that even the various schools of Buddhism differ with regard to this possibility in terms of whether any individual other than Gautama can achieve buddhahood (Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism: An Introduction and Guide*, third edition. [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962], 45-58).

calendar from when Mohammed fled the Arabs in Mecca to go to Medina in AD 622. This event, which is called the Hijira (more properly, the Hijra, which means "emigration"), is probably the reason that many people assume that Islam has an historical foundation.[29] What is less commonly known is that this journey to Medina was made partially because there were some in Medina who welcomed him as the promised Messiah the Jewish rabbis proclaimed.[30] When the Jews in Medina decided that

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[29] At the time of Mohammed's flight, the destination city was called Yathrib. It was renamed by Mohammed as Medina (or Madinah) which means "the city" and is a shortened version of the city of the prophet. The Muslim calendar is a lunar calendar of 354 days dated after the official start of this emigration, July 16, AD 622.

[30] Robert Payne, *The History of Islam*, (New York: Dorset Press, 1990), 23-26. As Pickthall puts it in his explanation of Surah 2, "So plainly did [the Jewish rabbis in Medina] describe the coming Prophet that pilgrims from [Medina] recognized the Prophet, when he addressed them in Mecca, as the same whom the Jewish doctors had described to them" (Muhammad M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an: Text and Explanatory Translation*, [Mecca: Muslim World League, 1977], 3–all Qur'an citations are from this translation). A second factor leading to the Hijira is that the Arabs in Mecca were threatening Mohammed because his new teachings threatened their lucrative business as a pagan center of worship, especially the Kaaba (Payne, *The History of Islam*, 23).

Mohammed was not the Messiah and consequently questioned his position as a prophet, Mohammed had a revelation which made Mecca the center of Muslim worship. Further, Jews became viewed as enemies.[31] As we will see, the actual foundation of Islam is the Qur'an, a collection of revelations (*Surahs*) that Mohammed proclaimed to his followers.

According to Mohammed's testimony, these revelations began in the year AD 610, twelve years before start of the Muslim calendar. In that year, as was his custom, Mohammed retreated to a cave for meditation during the month of Ramadan.[32] As he sat there in

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[31] Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not A Muslim*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995), 91-99. Safi carefully points out that the Jewish population at Medina was of a mixed bag which primarily involved political loyalty–some accepted Mohammed while others did not. He suggests that the tensions between the Muslims and the Jews developed much later (Omid Safi, *Memories of Mohammed: Why the Prophet Matters*, [NY: Harper Collins, 2009], 139-40).

[32] Having Ramadan as a month of fasting long preceded Mohammed among the Arabs, along with a number of various other customs which are integral to modern Islam including a pilgrimage to Mecca and praying towards the Kaaba in Mecca (Harbin, *To Serve Other Gods,* 179 fn 6).

isolation, he reported seeing a vision of the angel Gabriel, in which the "illiterate" Mohammed was told to read a scroll.[33] After several protests, Mohammed read the scroll. Upon awakening, he remembered the words, although tradition reports that he was so distraught that he considered suicide.[34] At this point, he heard a voice telling him that the angel was Gabriel and Mohammed was Allah's messenger. Mohammed returned home where he told his wife, Khadija, what he had seen. She quietly listened to his report and reassured him. Later they visited her cousin, Waraqa, who claimed that Mohammed had seen the same angel who had come to Moses. The key thing to note here is that the only way we know that Mohammed

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[33] Muslim biographers report that this vision occurred in a dream (Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, [Delhi: Crescent Publishing, 1978], 75). While it has traditionally been held that Mohammed was illiterate, this is less defended today. Shorrosh gives several reasons to suggest that Mohammed was not illiterate (Anis A. Shorrosh, *Islam Revealed: A Christian Arab's View of Islam*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988], 52-54). It is perhaps for this reason that Safi translates the Arabic as "recite," rather than "read" (*Memories of Mohammed*, 103-4).

[34] These words are recorded in Surah 96 of the Qur'an.

saw the vision which established his role as prophet was
that Mohammed told us so.

Over the next twenty-two years, Mohammed gave a
number of other revelations to his followers, although only
four of them specifically claim to have come from Gabriel.
Few of these revelations were written down at the time they
were given, and it is debated as to how many were actually
in written form during the lifetime of Mohammed.[35] The
revelations were given in a "bit-by-bit" manner, and then
collected into Surahs or chapters. Islamic teaching indicates
that after Mohammed received a revelation, he would
indicate to his followers where it should fit in the body of
teaching which had been collected to that point.[36] However,

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[35] Pickthall maintains that all were transcribed at that point
(*The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, xvi). On the other hand Ibn
Warraq states that this is not clear ("Introduction" in *The Origins of the
Koran,* edited by Ibn Warraq, [Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books,
1998], 10). Payne goes so far to state that not only was no final edition
prepared, "many of the suras were not yet written down" (*The History
of Islam*, 91).

[36] Victor Danner, *The Islamic Tradition: An Introduction*,
(Amity NY: Amity House, 1988), 62.

it is generally agreed that at the point of his death in AD

632, there was no actual collection of all of the 114 Surahs

of the Qur'an we have today.[37]

So, the Qur'an is a collection of revelations that

Mohammed gave to his followers. These revelations consist

of various teachings given by Mohammed. Some of these

revelations are very general and many provide good moral

teaching. But some of them are also very specific in nature,

and seem rather convenient in terms of when they were

given and their subject matter. These latter, especially, raise

questions. For example, part of Surah 2 was given at

Medina when the Jews there began to question

Mohammed's call. As a result, the revelation directs that

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[37] As Pickthall puts it, "the written surahs were dispersed
among the people" (*The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an,* xvi). Ibn
Warraq expands on this noting that since there was no single collection,
various followers formed their own collections which produced what he
calls a "chaotic situation." While 'Uthman (the third caliph, 644-656)
tried to standardize the text, it was an unpointed consonantal text.
Although he ordered all other traditions destroyed, variations persisted
for at least four centuries (*The Origins of the Koran*, 14-15).

the followers of Mohammed pray towards the Kaabah (at

the time, a pagan shrine in Mecca), as opposed to

Jerusalem.[38] Likewise Surah 33 contains a section which

directed Mohammed's adopted son to divorce his wife,

Zeynab, and for Mohammed to marry her.[39] Muslim

apologists do not deny the directive but try to explain it

away. Pickthall asserts that this was done for political

reasons.[40] Haykl also defends Mohammed and attacks non-

Islamic writers who bring up the matter, even though he

admits that the account is not a fabrication but is based on

Muslim sources, including *hadith*.[41] (The hadith is the

traditional collection of sayings of Mohammed and his

companions which relate amplifying information to the

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[38] Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an,* 3 and footnote 1 on page 22 (see Surah 2:142-145).
[39] Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, 439-440 (see Surah 33:2-7).
[40] Ibid.
[41] Haykal also attempts to deny that tradition that Mohammed was sexually attracted to the woman, but then dismisses the matter by asserting that "rules which are law to the people at large do not apply to the great" (*The Life of Muhammad,* 287).

material that is in the Qur'an.[42]) However, other scholars

maintain that Muslim sources "give the entire story a

sexual interpretation" suggesting that Mohammed was

sexually attracted to Zeynab. As Aisha, one of

Mohammed's wives, is reported to have said, "Truly your

God seems to have been very quick in fulfilling your

prayers."[43]

In addition, the Qur'an claims to be a revelation of

God like the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. Surah 3:3 states

"He hath revealed unto thee (Mohammad) the Scripture

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[42] These sayings and actions are items which were remembered by his friends and followers, which were passed on after Mohammed's death. Safi expresses it well when he notes "[t]here are multiple hadith collections of various degrees of reliability; together they form one of the major sources for understanding the life of Mohammed" (*Memories of Mohammed,* 18). Two key collections have been made by Muhammad Ism'l al-Bukhari and Muslim b. al-Hajjah al-Nisaburi, both dating from the 800's, and both collections containing about 3000 hadith. In the Sunni tradition, both achieved a 'canonical status' although today Muslim scholars consider many individual hadith spurious (Williams, John Alden, *Islam*, [New York: George Braziller, 1962], 57-59). It is a point of interest that the premise that a martyr for Islam will receive 70 or 72 virgins in paradise comes from the hadith.

[43] Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not A Muslim*, 100.

with truth, confirming that which was (revealed) before it, even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel." However, this revelation goes beyond or seems to change what God had given to earlier prophets ranging from Adam to Jesus,[44] and thus at key places Christians find that it differs from the Bible. Shorrosh cites a number of examples which he maintains provide an incomplete list.[45] A key example in the Old Testament is associated with Abraham where there are a number of differences. For example, after Sarah demanded Hagar's expulsion, the Qur'an has Abraham taking Hagar and Ishmael to Mecca where they built the Kaaba (Surah 2:125-127). While the book of Moses records that Abraham was told by God to sacrifice his son Isaac, the Qur'an is not as clear, and most Muslims argue that the

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[44] The Qur'an mentions at least twenty earlier prophets by name, and Jesus is included as one of them (Ayub Hassan, *Islamic Belief*, [Dehli: Hindustan Publications, 1984], 76).
[45] Shorrosh, *Islam Revealed,* 201-221.

son was Ishmael since he was the older.[46] Not

coincidentally, Ishmael is viewed as the ancestor of the

Arabs.[47] In the New Testament, one of the most significant

differences is the denial of the crucifixion. Surahs 4:157-58

assert "And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah

Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger–They slew him not

nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those

who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have

no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they

slew him not for certain. But Allah took him up unto

Himself." There are a variety of explanations for this, but

the dominant Muslim teaching seems to understand this

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[46] See Surah 37:102-113. The Qur'an here states "when (his son) was old enough to walk with him, (Abraham) said: O my dear son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice thee" (102). After God intervenes and gives a substitute, Surah 112 goes on to say "And We gave him tidings of the birth of Isaac, a Prophet of the righteous." As Safi puts it, most Muslims believe that since Ishmael was the older, he was the "only son" (Safi, *Memories of Mohammed*, 21). This, of course, ignores part of the Genesis account which states, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, . . ." (Gen 22:2, NASB) specifying that the "only son" is Isaac.

[47] S.D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*, third edition, (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 19-32

verse to indicate that when Judas led the party to arrest

Jesus, Jesus was taken up by God and Judas was

transformed to look like Jesus and was crucified in his

place.[48]

Muslims claim that as the messenger, Mohammed

had no control on the revelations which he gave.[49] They

accept the Qur'an not only as the word of God but as the

final word that God gave to mankind.[50] As such, they assert

that it supplants the Bible as revelation, which they claim

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[48] Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell, *Islam in Context: Past, Present and Future*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 78-79. Shorrrosh cites several different variations (*Islam Revealed,* 109-10).

[49] Danner, *The Islamic Tradition: An Introduction,* 62.

[50] While Muslims accept the Hebrew and Christian Bibles as holy books, they view them as corrupted. As Masri expresses it, when the Book of Moses became corrupted, God sent the Psalms of David, when it was corrupted, God sent the New Testament, and when the New Testament was corrupted, God sent the Qur'an, which is incorruptible "for it is the word of God" (Fouad Masri, *Is the Injeel Corrupted?*, [Indianapolis, IN: The Crescent Project, 2006], 9-10). This raises some very significant questions. If the first three books were God's word, then how did they become corrupted? If they could become corrupted, then how do we know that the Qur'an is incorruptible? If the Bible is corrupted, then who corrupted it and when? Unfortunately, these questions lie outside the scope of this study.

has been corrupted in its transmission. In contrast, their

claim is that the Qur'an which they now have is exactly

what God gave to Mohammed without any changes.[51] What

is clear, whatever the source of Mohammed's revelations,

the only validation that is available for them is

Mohammed's word.

The Historical Foundation of Judaism

Judaism as we know it dates from early to middle part of

the first millennium AD.[52] Following the fall of Jerusalem

in AD 70, the early Rabbis began writing down the oral

traditions that they had developed to clarify how to follow

the Mosaic Law or Torah.[53] This commentary, written in

Hebrew, is called the *Mishnah*. Sometime after the second

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[51] Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths*, 61.

[52] Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths*, 59-61.

[53] The Hebrew term is Torah which can be translated law, but more properly denotes teaching. As Bamberger puts it, "the customary rendering of 'law' is not wrong, but it is not adequate. Torah means: the direction given by God to man for the guidance of his life" (Bernard J. Bamberger, *The Story of Judaism*, third edition, [New York: Schocken Books, 1970], 26).

century AD, the Jews supplemented the commentary with a second commentary (essentially a commentary on the commentary) called the *Gemarah*, which is written in Aramaic. In essence this accepted the loss of the temple and provided guidelines on how to live a lifestyle that adhered to the Law, regardless.[54] Combined, these form the Talmud which is the guideline for modern Judaism. But both of these commentaries really address and interpret the Mosaic Law which far transcends the temple and its associated sacrificial system.[55] While modern Judaism allows the Jews to worship without a temple, the heart of that worship still depends on the Mosaic Law, and as such, we need to look there for the foundation of Judaism.

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[54] Harbin, *To Serve Other Gods,* 57.
[55] This is somewhat analogous to modern American jurisprudence which focuses on the myriads of court cases and legislative actions but occasionally has to go back to the ground rules which are set forth in the Constitution. There are a number of situations where a thoughtful legal analyst is given pause at the convoluted thinking that arrives at some conclusions. We see similarities in the New Testament on a number of occasions where Jesus confronts the legal scholars of his day on issues such as their interpretation of the Sabbath.

The Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) claims that the Mosaic Law was given to the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai after the nation had departed from Egypt during the Passover-Exodus event. According to Exodus 19, the first revelation God gave to the nation through Moses took place almost immediately after they arrived at Sinai, three months after the nation had left Egypt following the Passover. After the nation arrived, Moses went up the mountain where he received information that he was to relay to the people consisting of two key points. First, Moses was to remind the people that they had been eyewitnesses to what God had done to the Egyptians. Second, the people were to hear God speak to the entire nation so that they would believe Moses.

Exodus 19:18 relates how the people prepared for three days and then on the appointed day they saw lightning and heard thunder in the cloud. As they stood in wonder and fear, Moses climbed the mountain where God told

Moses to go back down and make sure that the people understood that they were to stay back. Although Moses objected that he was sure that the people did understand, he obeyed and went back down to warn the people.

According to Exodus, it was at this point that God delivered what we call the Ten Commandments to the nation.[56] The transition from chapter 19 to chapter 20 implies that Moses was still down with the people when God spoke those words. Further, we do not read that Moses went back up the mountain until after the Ten Commandments had been given (20:21). Likewise, at the end of the Ten Commandments the people complain to Moses that God's speaking to them was frightening and in 20:18 we are told that when the people heard the thunder and the trumpet sound, and they saw the lightning as well

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[56] C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Second Book of Moses, Exodus*, in Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, vol. 2,, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976 reprint ed), 105.

as the smoke on the mountain, they stood afar off.

Basically, they backed away out of fear.[57] Their plea to

Moses was, "don't let God speak to us, or we will die."

As a result, Moses became a spokesman for God.

He returned up the mountain where he was given directions

for the nation. The first point of this revelation in Ex 20:22

is that Moses was to remind the people that they had seen

that God had spoken to them (in the Hebrew, the "you" is

plural). The point seems to be that the people knew from

what they had seen and heard that Moses was indeed

reporting what God said.

Moses then brought down the first of a series of

guidelines on how the people of the nation were to relate

not only to God, but to one another (chapters 20:23-23:33).

He recounted those guidelines to the people and they

agreed that they would do that (24:3). With this agreement,

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[57] Cassuto phrases it, "they retreated in panic" (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, translated by Israel Abrahams, [Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1987], 253).

the text states that Moses then wrote down what God had already told him (24:4) in what was called the "book of the covenant" (24:7).

The exact content of "the book of the covenant" is not clear. Exodus 24:4 says it included "all the words of the Lord." It may have been the material in Genesis and Exodus 1-23. Or, it may have been just the minimum of what God had said to the Israelites at that location and time, which would be the material we now see in Exodus 20-23.[58] In either case, what Moses wrote down at this point would have been the first edition of Torah. But, God had a lot more to reveal to the nation as they spent a year at the foot of Sinai. According to the text, this core was soon expanded as God continued to work with the nation first at

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[58] Modern scholars tend to opt for the smaller section, although there is still disagreement on the scope. For example, Eissfeldt argues for 20:22-23:33 based on context (Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, translated by P. R. Ackroyd [New York: Harper and Row, 1965], 212-213), while Childs places the start at 21:1 (Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974], 453-454).

Sinai, and then through the journeys leading up to the conquest. The text then maintains that over the years, new sections were added by the nation up until the last prophet in the post-exilic period, Malachi.

While this expansion process is interesting, it lies outside the scope of the study. Here, we should just note that the text asserts that the nation of Israel had been eye-witnesses to God's working in history in the Exodus event. Moreover, this Exodus event was to become a critical foundation to God's future dealings with the nation. The outline of the Law which we call the Ten Commandments is recorded twice (Ex 20 and Deut 5). On both occasions it is preceded by a very interesting statement: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:2-3 and Deut 5:6-7). There is an implied cause and effect relationship set forth here that Israel was

expected to obey because of what God had done.[59] More

than this, the phrase, "brought you out of the land of

Egypt" or an equivalent shows up at least 138 times in the

Old Testament. In other words, this event was the authority

basis given to the nation of Israel and thus is in essence the

foundation of Judaism.

Despite the development of the Talmud as the

outline of modern Judaism, Jews today still look to this

event as the foundation of their religion as shown by the

continued celebration of the Passover. Whenever the

Passover is celebrated, a key component is begun by the

youngest child who begins with the question, "Why is this

night different from all other nights?" The oldest family

member then begins the response, "We were slaves to

Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord redeemed us with a mighty

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[59] Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, translated by J.S. Bowden, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962),161-62.

hand."[60] So Judaism claims that it is based on this historical event, and as an historical event the Passover-Exodus is subject to the same issues of validation as other ancient historical events.[61]

The Historical Foundation of Christianity

The founder of Christianity is Jesus who presented himself as bringing in the kingdom promised in the Old Testament. What Christians call the New Testament presents him as the Messiah for whom the Jews were looking. As such, Christianity claims that it is not only a continuation, but a fulfillment of the Judaism of the Old Testament so the historical foundation of Judaism (the Passover-Exodus

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[60] Harold A. Sevener, ed., *Passover Haggadah for Biblical Jews and Christians*, (Orangeburg, NY: Chosen People Ministries, nd), 16.

[61] While many modern scholars dismiss the historical claims of the Old Testament in general and the Pentateuch especially, modern critical thinking underlying the Documentary Hypothesis does not address the issue as an historical matter, but rather ignores the claims of the text having presupposed that a hypothetical reconstruction is preferable. Cf. Gary Edward Schnittjer, *The Torah Story*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 15.

event) is a critical component of that claim. But, more importantly, Christianity claims that it is based on a second historical event, namely the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus to demonstrate that he was the Messiah–and more. This is evident within the pages of the New Testament itself in several places. One of the clearest is where Paul develops an extensive argument asserting the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:1-19. He concludes that if the resurrection did not occur, then those who believe in Jesus have a faith that is worthless, and there is no hope. As Edwin Yamauchi points out, there is significant corroborative evidence to this fact.[62]

Today it is generally agreed that Jesus actually lived and walked the soil of Galilee and Judea during the first part of the first century AD. It is also generally conceded that Jesus was crucified, even by many who argue that

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[62] As interviewed by Lee Strobel (*The Case for Christ*, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 73-91).

there was no resurrection.[63] However, to deny the

resurrection, one has to explain away a number of items,

not the least of which is the empty tomb. Since this is the

understood foundation of Christianity, it is not surprising

that the reality of that event has been subject to a multitude

of attacks, and there are many excellent works which

explore the resurrection as an historical event.[64] For our

purposes, the salient point is that from the beginning

Christianity has claimed to be based on an historical event.

Whether one wants to accept the historicity of that event or

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[63] John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 123-158.

[64] A number of works could be cited here ranging from very scholarly to more popular. The following is just a partial list. J.N.D. Anderson, *The Evidence for the Resurrection* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1966). Paul Copan and Ronald K. Tacelli, editors, *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction? A Debate Between William Lane Craig and Gerd Lüdermann*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000). William Lane Craig, *Knowing the Truth About the Resurrection* (Ann Arbor MI: Servant, 1988). William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Chicago: Moody, 1981). Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort The Gospels*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006. Josh McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor* (San Bernadino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1981). Frank Morison, *Who Moved The Stone?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

not is another matter.

Conclusions

In this brief survey, we have looked at the foundations

which are claimed by five different religions. In the case of

the first three, the religions themselves maintain that they

are based simply on declarations of their founders, which

upon examination are unsupported. As I have studied

various other religions, I have found that with the exception

of the two noted above, Judaism and Christianity, every

religion I have examined also fits that pattern. For example,

Mormonism is based on the unsupported claim of Joseph

Smith that he had revelation from the angel Moroni.

Mormon historians Arrington and Bitton note that "in the

strictest sense, historical research can never either confirm

or disprove alleged supernatural appearances."[65] This is a

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[65] Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 7.

valid observation, but the point is that the only evidence

that the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith is Joseph

Smith's word, and when one is listening to an unsupported

witness the character of the witness is extremely important–

and that can be demonstrated through historical research.[66]

In addition, we must remember that Joseph Smith also

claimed that the book of Mormon was a translation of gold

plates which no-one physically saw,[67] and relates what is

supposed to be an historical account of two great

civilizations for which there is absolutely no evidence.[68]

So what does this mean? While Arrington and

Bitton are correct that "historical research can never either

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[66] According to Charles and Steven Crane, this is why the Latter Day Saint Church is distancing itself from its founder. They cite a number of issues which raise questions regarding Joseph Smith's character and integrity (Charles Crane and Steven Crane, *Ashamed of Joseph*, (Joplin MO: College Press Publishing Co., 1993), note especially 45-76.

[67] While the Book of Mormon contains affidavits of witnesses that they saw the gold plates, a more careful examination suggests that at best they "saw them with the eye of faith" (Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975], 78).

[68] Crane and Crane, *Ashamed of Joseph*, 113-120.

confirm or disprove alleged supernatural appearances," it can evaluate historical events and give a context which can be used to corroborate the claims. This necessarily includes events which claim non-physical (i.e., spiritual) causes, such as a resurrection.[69] This is why history is not only important, but it is critical—not just for Christianity, but for every religion. If, as Paul claims, Christianity can bear up to rigorous historical scrutiny, then to become a Christian is not a mere leap of faith. But conversely to follow the teaching of someone just because he (or she) said so, would be not only a blind leap of faith, but an extremely disastrous one.

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[69] Here is an area where our secular culture is setting the terms of the debate, specifically by limiting history to physical causes for physical events. That is, any event which involves spiritual forces is ruled non-historical by definition. This was brought home to me several years ago, when after presenting a paper at a national conference, I submitted an article drawn from that paper to a conservative Christian historical journal proposing using historical methodology as a means by which a miracle might be validated. I was surprised at the reason the article was rejected–it was because this evangelical Christian organization would only accept articles that addressed history in terms of naturalistic assumptions.

A Biblical-Theological and Historical Critique of the Doctrine of Hell as an Impetus in Evangelism
J. Thad Harless[1]

Introduction

Editors Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson of *Hell Under Fire,* have written that doctrinally, "hell is under fire", bemoaning the contemporary attack by liberal scholarship upon the traditional doctrine of hell as known in historical, conservative, and evangelical theologies.[2] Indeed Clark Pinnock has commented that, "The doctrine once in full flower is drooping."[3] Equally as distressing, is research by Ed Stetzer suggesting that evangelistic practices seem to also be "under fire" as he has recently discovered that "61 percent of people have not shared their faith with anyone in the last 6 months while 20 percent of

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[1] Thaddeus Harless., Dmin., is currently senior pastor of New Life Church in Morton, IL.

[2] R. Albert Mohler, "Modern Theology: The Disappearance of Hell" in *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment,* eds. Morgan and Peterson, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 11.

[3] Clark H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View" in *Four Views on Hell* eds. Gundry and Crockett, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 136.

people rarely or never pray for the unsaved.[4] He continues

in the same research to state despondently that, "48 percent

of Christians have not invited anyone to church in the last 6

months" even though "80 percent of those same individuals

studied" believe that evangelism is a biblical requirement.[5]

One therefore immediately wonders if there is a correlation

between the waning numbers of conservative evangelicals

participating in evangelistic practices and the current

eroding of the traditional doctrine of hell.

John Cheeseman, in an article entitled *Hell-A Prime

Motive For Evangelism*, writes that the doctrine of hell is,

"crucial to the whole subject of mission and evangelism"

and believes that, "one of the reasons why Christian

missions have lost their impetus in recent years is the fact

that evangelical Christians have become uncertain on this

very issue and this uncertainty has led to an undoubted

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[4] Ed Stetzer, New Research: Churchgoers Believe in Sharing Faith, But Most Never Do, http://www.edstetzer.com/2012/08/new-research-churchgoers-belie.html (accessed March 25, 2013).
[5] Mohler, *Hell Under Fire*.

lessening of concern for those who don't know Christ"[6] With equal insight Stanley Gundry and William Crockett, editors of *Four Views of Hell,* have acknowledged in this work that so disturbing is the traditional doctrine of hell that "most pastors and church members simply ignore the doctrine of final retribution, preferring to talk in vague terms about a separation of the wicked from the righteous."[7] Douglas Groothuis in his article, *Effective Evangelism*, goes so far as to write that regarding hell, "many evangelicals are ashamed of this biblical doctrine, viewing it as a blemish to be covered up by the cosmetic of divine love."[8] He would add that that as Christians we must, "welcome people to find eternal life in Christ, but we must also warn them of the eternal death awaiting those who reject the Gospel.[9] Therefore, as the doctrine of hell is

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[6] John Cheeseman, "Hell-A Prime Motive for Evangelism," *CrossWay*, no. 33 (Autumn 1989).

[7] Gundry, *Four Views on Hell*, 7.

[8] Douglas Groothuis, "Effective Evangelism." http://www.equip.org/PDF/DH198.pdf (accessed, March 28)

[9] Ibid.

understood as imminently important to evangelistic motivation, this paper will focus upon the historical understandings and current debate over the traditional doctrine of hell contra conditionalism or annihilationalism as each of these views secures its meaning from ample Scriptural warrant and are currently competing for doctrinal supremacy. This is not to assert that doctrines such as Universalism are not vying for greater acceptance, yet it is as J.I. Packer writes, "most universalists (granted, not all) concede that Universalism is not clearly taught in the Bible".[10] Therefore this paper will compare doctrines with greater Scriptural citation as opposed to conjectures predicated on larger theological schemata. As such, it is hoped that this paper will secure the truth of the traditional doctrine of hell so as to regain or encourage an evangelistic emphasis in the contemporary church.

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[10] J.I. Packer, Universalism: Will Everyone Be Saved?, in *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004) 171.

Historically, R. Albert Mohler Jr. writes, "for over sixteen centuries… hell has been understood to be the judgment of God on sinners without faith in Christ. Hell was understood to be spatial and eternal, characterized by the most awful biblical metaphors of fire and torment."[11] He further comments that,

> The traditional doctrine of hell now bears the mark of *odium theologium*-a doctrine retained only by the most stalwart defenders of conservative theology, Catholic and Protestant. Its defenders are seemingly few. The doctrine is routinely dismissed as an embarrassing artifact from an ancient age-a reminder of Christianity's rejected worldview…Based in the New Testament texts concerning hell, judgment, and the afterlife, the earliest Christian preachers and theologians understood hell [and] the early Christian evangelists and preachers called sinners to faith in Christ and warned of the sure reality of hell and the eternal punishment of the impenitent.[12]

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[11] Mohler, *Hell Under Fire*, 16-17.
[12] Ibid.

Indeed, the testimony in the first half of the second century is consistent concerning the destiny of those wicked and unrepentant. William V. Crockett in his essay entitled *The Metaphorical View* (of hell) writes that, "during the time of the early Apostolic Fathers, Christians believed hell would be a place of eternal, conscious punishment."[13] Yet there would be a small number of dissenters of this traditional view of Hell.

The first major challenge to the traditional doctrine of Hell came from Origen (ca. A.D. 184-254), whose doctrine of *apokatastasis* promised the total and ultimate restitution of all things and all persons.[14] According to author Dimitris Kyrtatas in, "*The Origins of Christian Hell*", the church father Origen, understood hell as more a

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[13] Gundry, *Four Views on Hell*, 65.
[14] Mohler, *Hell under Fire*, 17.

place of refinement than punishment."[15] Origen wrote in

Contra Celsum that,

> It is not right to explain to everybody all that
> might be said on this subject [i.e. of purifying
> fire]. . . It is risky to commit to writing the
> explanation of these matters, because the
> multitudes do not require any more
> instruction than that punishment is to be
> inflicted upon sinners. It is not of advantage
> to go on the truths which lie behind it because
> there are people who are scarcely restrained
> by fear of everlasting punishment from the
> vast flood of evil and the sins that are
> committed in consequence of it" (Contra
> Celsum 6.25–6).[16]

Constable[17] and Froom[18], clearly overlooking Origen and

misinterpreting the fathers, disclose in their research that

supposedly all the apostolic fathers supported the views of

conditional immortality, the understanding that immortality

is God's gift through the redemption of Jesus and that only

the saved will live forever while the damned will

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[15] Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, "The Origins of Christian Hell,"
Numen: International Review for the History of Religions, no. 2/3
(2009): 282-97. EBSCO host (accessed March 25,2013)

[16] Ibid., 282-97.

[17] Henry Constable, *Duration and Nature* (Tyger Valley,
South Africa: Ulan Press, 2012), 167-70.

[18] LeRoy Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*
(Washington: Review and Herald, 1965), I: 757-802.

eventually exist no more. In objection of such outlandish considerations is the weight of overwhelming scholarship and church Council declarations. Consider also S.D.F Salmond as he strenuously objected to any church father beyond Origen accepting non-traditionalists conclusions writing that Constable and Froom's finds are, "either incidental statements which have to be balanced by others that are at once more definite and more continuous; or they are popular statements and simple repetitions of the terms of Scripture; or they mean that the soul is not absolutely self-subsistent, but depends for its existence and its survival on God; or they have in view only the sensitive soul as distinguished from the rational soul or responsible spirit.[19] In other words, Constable and Froom have greatly taken the patristics understandings of hell out of context or else indeed do not correctly comprehend the early father's writings in their entirety. More recent scholarship agrees

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[19] Steward DF Salmond. *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895), 593-94.

with Salmond as John R. Sachs in *Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell,* has clarified that early Christian theologians clearly concurred with the traditional views of eternal and everlasting punishment, although he mentions that Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa argued for some extremely mild form of *apocatastasis*, but were not condemned.[20] Further, to cement the patristic's ideas of hell, consider these correspondences from early church fathers:
Epistle to Diognetus (ca A.D. 138)

> …when you fear the death which is real, which is kept for those that shall be condemned to the everlasting fire, which shall punish up to the end those that were delivered to it. Then you will marvel at those who endure for the sake of righteousness (10:7-8)

2 Clement (ca A.D. 150)

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[20] John R. Sachs, "Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell," *Theological Studies* 52, no. 2 (June 1991): 227. *Religion and Philosophy Collection*, EBSCO*host* (accessed March 26, 2013)

> Nothing shall rescue us from eternal punishment, if we neglect his commandments (6:7)

Martyrdom of Polycarp (ca. A.D. 156-160)

> And the fire of their cruel torturers had no heat for them, for they set before their eyes an escape from the fire which is everlasting and is never quenched (2:3)

In addition, in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, a work belonging to the literature of the apocryphal apocalypses, there is further and explicit confirmation regarding early attestation to an eternal hell. The *Apocalypse of Peter*, written between A.D. 125 and A.D.150 is extremely valuable to the "history of hell as it is the first major Christian account of postmortem punishment outside of the New Testament" and paints a most lurid and gruesome picture of an eternal hell.[21] Further, the famous church father Augustine (A.D. 354-430) in, *The City of God*, wrote regarding Matthew 25:46

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[21] Jan N. Bremmer, "Christian Hell: From the Apocalypse of Peter to the Apocalypse of Paul," *Numen: International Review For The History of Religions* 56, no. 2/3 (2009): 298-325. *Religion and Philosophy Collection*, EBSCO*host* (accessed March 26,2013)

usage of the word "eternal" (*aionios*) in regards to heaven

and hell that,

> If both are "eternal", it follows necessarily that
> either both are to be taken as long-lasting but
> finite, or both as endless and perpetual. The
> phrases "eternal punishment" and "eternal life"
> are parallel and it would be absurd to use them
> in one and the same sentence to mean: "Eternal
> life will be infinite, while eternal punishment
> will have an end." Hence, because the eternal
> life of the saints will be endless, the eternal
> punishment also, for those condemned to it, will
> assuredly have no end.[22]

Clearly then, Origen's teaching was markedly a rejection of

the patristic consensus and the church responded in 553 at

the fifth ecumenical council (Constantinople II) with a

series of anathemas against Origen and his teachings. The

ninth anathema against Origen in refutation of his belief on

Hell states that, "If anyone says or thinks that the

punishment of demons and of impious men is only

temporary, and will one day have an end and that a

restoration [*apokatastasis*] will take place of demons and of

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[22] Augustine, *City of God* (n.p.: trans Bettenson, n.d.).

impious men, let him be anathema."[23] Thomas Oden

summarizes succinctly that the definite patristic consensus

concerning hell as that which, "expresses the intent of a

holy God to destroy sin completely and forever. Hell says

not merely a temporal no but an eternal no to sin. The

rejection of evil by the holy God is like a fire that burns on,

a worm that dies not."[24] Therefore it can be concretely

established that the patristic era prodigiously viewed hell as

an eternal and retributive judgment against the devil and all

unrepentative mankind. This general consensus of the early

fathers was held well through the Reformation era of the

church with only minimal rejections of this doctrine posed

by small sects and heretics.[25] It is the brief examination of

the two key figures of the Reformation that will now follow

in further cementing the idea of hell from a distinctly

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[23] "The Anathemas against Origen," in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church,* ed. Henry R. Percival (NPNF; Grand Rapids: Edrdmans,1979), 320.

[24] Thomas Oden, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 3*: Life in the Spirit* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1992), 450.

[25] Mohler, *Hell under Fire*, 18.

Protestant viewpoint, as much theology splintered between the Catholic and Protestant church during this historic parting of ways.

The Reformation era of church history was indeed revolutionary and held, as mentioned above, to the general consensus of the early fathers within the Catholic church. Yet the views of these Protestant fathers concerning the doctrine of hell will be instructive cumulatively and so they must be reviewed briefly. Martin Luther (1483-1536), the father of the Reformation, agreed with Augustine that the future destiny of the wicked involves eternal punishment as opposed to temporal judgment.[26] We learn from Luther's commentary on Psalm 21 that,

> The fiery oven is ignited merely by the unbearable appearance of God and endures eternally. For the Day of Judgment will not last for a moment only but will stand throughout eternity and will thereafter never come to an end. Constantly the damned will be judged, constantly they will suffer pain, and constantly

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[26]. Edward William Fudge, and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000). 122

> they will be a fiery oven, that is, they will be
> tortured within by supreme distress and
> tribulation.[27]

John Calvin (1509-1564), the key leader of the Reformed branch of the Reformation also recognized that Scripture uses language consistent with the eternity of hell.[28] In his commentary of 2 Thessalonians 1:9 he writes that the eternity of hell's sufferings corresponds to the eternity of Christ's glory in this verse. Calvin writes that, "The phrase which he adds in apposition [to Christ's eternal glory] explains the nature of punishment which he had mentioned- it is eternal punishment and death which has no end. The perpetual duration of this death is proved from the fact that its opposite is the glory of Christ. This is eternal and has no end. Hence the violent nature of that death will never cease."[29] Even leading conditionalists such as Edward

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27. Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says, 3 Vols.* (Louis: Concordia, 1959), 2:625-27.

28. Edward William Fudge, and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue*, 122.

29. John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, Calvin's Commentaries, Ed. D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance, Trans. R. Mackenzie* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 392.

Fudge understand that Calvin, more than any other, "put the Protestant stamp of approval on the traditional understanding of unending conscious torment and indestructible souls [and that]…Calvin's views became the tradition of the overwhelming majority."[30]

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed the consolidation of Protestant theology as the children and grandchildren of the Reformers formalized and systematized their doctrines.[31] However, these centuries gave rise to the first major stirrings against the traditional doctrine of hell as multitudinous currents of understanding flowed into the larger river of European thought. For example, a belief in the annihilation of the wicked became apparent among the Socinians, which earned them the commendation of Pierre Bayle, a radical French

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[30] Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment* (Eugene. OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 328.
[31] Mohler, *Hell under Fire*, 19.

polemicist.[32] Bayle considered the doctrine of hell as the, "greatest scandal of our theology for philosophical minds".[33] The Socinians, who had their origins under Fausto Socinius, argued that the character of God would not allow eternal torment for temporal sins; this simply was unjust of God in the mind of the Socinians.[34] However, other heretical beliefs held by the Socinians, such as their belief that the Son was not consubstantial with the Father along with the understanding that they denied the resurrection of the wicked largely curtailed their influence on the church and others except for perhaps among the upper elite.[35] D. P. Walker summarizes the general feeling of the more liberal leaning theologies of the seventeenth century regarding hell as enigmatic conjectures that had not

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Cited in D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 77.

[34] Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, 332.

[35] Walker, *The Decline of Hell, 5.Seventeenth Century Discussions of Eternal Torment*, 5.

become concrete objections to hell such as they were to

become in the eighteenth century. He writes,

> Thus people who had doubts about the eternity
> of hell, or who had come to disbelieve in it,
> refrained from publishing their doubts not only
> because of the personal risk involved, but also
> because of genuine moral scruples. In the 17th
> century disbelief in eternal torment seldom
> reached the level of a firm conviction, but at the
> most was a conjecture, which one might wish to
> be true; it was therefore understandable that one
> should hesitate to plunge the world into moral
> anarchy for the sake of only conjectural truth.[36]

Indeed, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) might serve as an

example or a throwback of the still stalwart, yet retreating

convictions of the larger population of his day concerning

the doctrine of hell. Edwards, the great colonial theologian-

preacher warned that,

> Consider that if once you get into hell, you'll
> never get out. If you should unexpectedly one of
> these days drop in there; [there] would be no
> remedy. They that go there return no more.
> Consider how dreadful it will be to suffer such
> an extremity forever. It is dreadful beyond

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[36] Ibid.

expression to suffer it half an hour. O the misery,
the tribulation and anguish that is endured.[37]

In reflection however, if the seventeenth century gave rise

to quiet conjectures over the duration of hell, the eighteenth

century saw the raucous explosion of Enlightenment

skepticism regarding this doctrine.

Church historian Gerald R. Cragg would comment

that this century was, "secular in spirit and destructive in

effect. It diffused a skepticism which gradually dissolved

the intellectual and religious patterns which had governed

European thought since Augustine."[38] He would further

write that this era was, "a deliberate challenge to accepted

beliefs. The theology and ethics of the churches were

subjected to a criticism more merciless than any which they

had hitherto faced.[39]

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[37] Jonathan Edwards, "The Torments of Hell Are Exceedingly
Great" in *Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729* ed. Kenneth P.
Minkema *(The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol.14* (New Haven,
Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 326.

[38] Geral R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648-
1789* (London: Penguin, 1960), 234.

[39] Ibid., 236-37.

The eighteenth century was certainly eventful as revolution swept France in Europe and the British colonies in America. Many who prided themselves as intellectuals dismissed organized religion as an authority unsuitable for a modern and enlightened age-all things in this age [must be] measured by the rule of reason.[40] Indeed, rationalism had reached its zenith in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the powers of reason were thought to be capable of understanding all that was needful and beneficial to be understood.[41] Yet the enthusiasm of this century chaffed over the terrible doctrine of hell as Rowell records that, "apart from anything else, [hell] was so grossly offensive to the optimism characteristic of eighteenth-century natural religion".[42] And so the battle between a belief in Biblical teaching and the optimism of reason

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[40] Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, 333.

[41] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day Vol. 2* (New York: Harper Collins, 1985), 185.

[42] Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 28-29.

sprang forth and created a great friction between religion and modern thought. Voltaire and other Enlightenment philosophers rejected Christianity outright, yet not just the doctrine of hell, but the entirety of Christian theology and the very idea of divine revelation.[43] However, the greatest negative doctrinal impact upon commoners, or the true beginning of the crisis of faith for the church, emerged in the pews of the nineteenth century, in the lauded Victorian era of England.

Often sentimentalized, the Victorian age was an era of great churchgoing as attendance at churches both rural and urban were at all-time highs.[44] This century saw the rise of Charles Spurgeon and the famed mega-church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Spurgeon would preach concerning the awful eternity of hell that,

> Suffice it for me to close up by saying, that the hell of hells will be to thee poor sinner, the thought, that it is to be forever. Thou wilt look

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[43] Mohler, *Hell under Fire*, 20.
[44] Ibid., 21.

> up there on the the throne of God, and it shall be
> written "forever"! When the damned jingle the
> burning irons of their torments, they shall say,
> "forever"! When they howl, echo cries
> "forever"![45]

However, the conservatism of Spurgeon was not shared by

all Victorians. Indeed, the nineteenth century was an age of

theological and social debate as Darwin championed

natural selection, Marx applied dialectical philosophy to

economics leading to desire for a utopian state and German

higher criticism was burgeoning, having a deleterious effect

upon the trustworthiness of the Bible. Therein became the

Victorian "crisis of faith" regarding Christian doctrine as it

was understood, and which has sense captured the interests

of many modern historians. A.N. Wilson has said regarding

this era that, "Perhaps only those who have known the

peace of God which passes all understanding can have any

conception of what was lost between a hundred and a

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[45] Charles H. Spurgeon, "Paul's First Prayer" a Sermon
Preached March 25, 1855, at Exeter Hall in London, *The New Park
Street Pulpit* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1856), 124.

hundred and fifty years ago when the human race in Western Europe began to discard Christianity".[46]

The Victorian "crisis of faith" spread throughout the aristocracy and the educated classes, and some theologians and preachers added their voice to the calls for doctrinal reformulation as hell was the center of their attention.[47] This nineteenth century saw the emergence of the Advent and Seventh-day Adventist Church as well as the formulation of the Jehovah's Witnesses, with each group denying either the eternal nature of suffering in Hell for the sinner or hell as a doctrine proper. Historian James Turner summarizes in a quipping fashion that the "gift" of nineteenth century theology to twentieth theology is that, "God must be a humanitarian".[48] Hence, the concept of a humanitarian God would have grandiose repercussions upon the theological reformulations of the twentieth

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[46] A.N. Wilson, *God's Funeral: A Biography of Faith and Doubt in Western Civilization* (New York: Random House, 1999), 4.

[47] Mohler, *Hell under Fire*, 21.

[48] James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985), 71.

century deriving from the stigma of this earlier era. Forevermore liberal theology would commend that God's love and "humanity" are His dominant attributes and therefore cringe at notions suggesting that a God of love and virtue could punish men forever in hell.

In 1989 John Stott, one of the most prominent and important evangelical leaders of the twentieth century reassessed his views of hell, creating shockwaves throughout conservative theological evangelicalism. Stott confessed, responding to a challenge from well-known Anglican and liberal theologian David Edward, that he found, "the concept [of hell] intolerable and did not understand how people can live with it without cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain."[49] Yet Stott sedated his emotions and insisted that he must submit his theology to Scripture and not the voice of his heart.[50]

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[49] David L. Edwards and John R. Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 314.
[50] Ibid.

However, Stott would soon construct an argument for annihilationism based on language, imagery, justice and universalism and even claimed that famed that Greek scholar F.F. Bruce considered annihilationism an acceptable interpretation of the Biblical text.[51]

This affirmation by Stott fueled the energies of conservative theology as in 1989, during the "Deerfield Evangelical Affirmations Meeting," sponsored by the National Association of Evangelicals and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, J.I. Packer responded to the attacks upon the traditional doctrine of hell. Packer's paper was entitled "*Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation: New Challenges to the Gospel: Universalism, and Justification by Faith,* in which he called Stott's argument "flimsy special pleading".[52] Packer would continue and commented in this meeting that,

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[51] Mohler, *Hell under Fire*, 30-31.

[52] J.I. Packer, *Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation in Evangelical Affirmations,* eds. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F.H, Henry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 126.

> What troubles me most here, I must confess, is the assumption of superior sensitivity by the conditionalists. Their assumption appears in the adjectives (awful, dreadful, terrible, fearful, intolerable, etc.) that they apply to the concept of eternal punishment, as if to suggest that holders of the historic view have never thought about the meaning of what they are saying…[this reflects] not superior spiritual sensitivity, but secular sentimentalism.[53]

Yet the wave of liberal notions regarding the doctrine of hell continued as in a 1999 General Audience at the Vatican, Pope John Paul II redefined hell as, "not a punishment imposed externally by God, but the condition resulting from attitudes and actions which people adopt in this life" thereby denying that God imposes hell as a permanent punishment to the wicked.[54] However, no two authors of this century have made the case for annihilationism with more intensity than theologians Clark Pinnock and Edward Fudge.

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[53] Ibid., 125-26.
[54] Cited in Mohler, *Hell under Fire*, 27.

Pinnock, an accomplished theologian, writes in *A Wideness in God's Mercy* that caring people, "cannot accept that God would subject anyone, even the most corrupt sinners, to unending torture in both body and soul as Augustine and Jonathan Edwards taught. If that is what hell means, many will conclude that there should not be a doctrine of hell in Christian theology."[55] Certainly, with such outright candor in the denial of the traditional doctrine of hell by Stott and Pinnock, the twentieth century is the era in which the evangelical identity had become tenuous and traditional doctrines such as the doctrine of hell were being questioned and reformulated by many of their theologians.

Edward Fudge, another leading conditionalist, would write in his highly influential work of that century entitled, *The Fire That Consumes*, that, "Evangelicals can rejoice that, in the providence of our gracious and

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[55] Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 157.

sovereign God, the recovery of a more Biblical understanding of hell is well underway".[56] And with Fudge's comments, theologians and churchmen can without question historically understand that the war for the traditional doctrine of hell has spilled over into the twenty-first century, the era now unfolding. Indeed, the twenty-first century is an era where conservative theology and the doctrine of hell is under fire and disintegrating in the heat of liberal argumentation.

There are primarily three views of hell, especially if one discounts the doctrine of Catholic purgatory or that the Bible is essentially mythological. Of course, there is the conservative, evangelical, traditional or classical view of hell that describes hell as the endless punishment of unrepentant sinners. There is also the annihilationist or conditionalist view which understands that those who die apart from saving faith in Jesus Christ will one day

[56] Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, 359.

essentially cease to exist. And finally, Universalists, who hold that ultimately all human beings created by God will be saved and enter into God's rest with the number of already glorified in heaven. The following polemics will cover only a brief survey of the core Biblical-Theological arguments surrounding the traditional and conditionalist understandings of hell for reasons already written in the introduction of this work.

Theologians who insist against the Biblical notion of an eternal hell often claim that conservative convictions regarding hell stem from an ancient reliance upon the acceptance of improper, non-Biblical philosophies. Edward Fudge, a leading conditionalist as mentioned above, insists that it was Greek Platonic thought that drove the engine of the doctrine of the soul's immortality, thereby subsequently influencing the ancient church fathers, such as Augustine, to believe first in an immortal soul and then a logically

following eternal hell.[57] Indeed, if the soul is immortal then

the hell for which it will reside must also be eternal.

Pinnock asserts that, "I believe that the real basis of the

traditional view of the nature of hell is not the Bible's talk

of the wicked perishing but an unbiblical anthropology that

is read into the text…If souls are naturally immortal, they

must necessarily spend a conscious eternity somewhere

and, if there is a *Gehenna* of fire, they would have to spend

it alive in fiery torment."[58] Fudge writes in furthering his

views that the fathers were heavily influenced by

Hellenistic thought in *The Fire That Consumes* that,

> Many Christian writers of the second and
> third centuries wanted to show their pagan
> neighbors the reasonableness of the Biblical
> faith. They did that the same way the Jewish
> apologist, Philo of Alexandria, had done it
> long before. They wrapped their
> understanding of Scripture in the robes of

[57] Edward William Fudge, and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue*, 185.

[58] Clark H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View" in *Four Views on Hell* eds. Gundry and Crockett, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 147.

philosophy, choosing from the vocabulary of worldly wisdom the words that sparkled and adorned it best…these apologists…zealous for their new found faith, set out to battle the pagan thinkers on their own turf…[59]

Fudge quotes the father Tertullian as an example as Tertullian in explanation of the eternal soul writes, "I may use, therefore, the opinion of Plato…Every soul is immortal."[60] However, Fudge himself admits that while most of the fathers saw the soul as contingent upon God and not inherently immortal, they viewed punishment as eternal, and were therefore in his mind inconsistent.[61] However interestingly, as evidence for Fudge's conclusion that the early fathers discernments were clouded regarding the immortally of the soul and were heavily influenced by Hellenistic thought, he quotes only one father in one paragraph within his magnum opus (*The Fire That Consumes*) regarding hell to this end. This is extremely

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[59] Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, 28-30.

[60] Ibid., 30. Taken from Turtellian's *Resurrection of the Flesh*, 3.

[61] Ibid., 22.

curious bearing in mind the level of merit he concedes to this assertion and proof of evidence.

There is no escaping the conclusion, as seen from the above historical review, that early Christian writers overwhelmingly held to the view that hell's punishments would be forever. However, is this view truly derived from Platonic thought regarding the immortality of the soul as Fudge, Pinnock and other conditionalist's contend, or is it more reasonable to maintain that these views of hell derive from the Scriptures?

To answer such a question one must also consider the non-platonic ideas also held by the early patristics. Indeed, many of the father's views have firm Scriptural attestation over and against Platonic ideas. Consider the fathers views over Jesus' uniqueness as the divine son of God, the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation alone, the resurrection of the body after death, *ex nihilo* creationism, Christian millenarianism, the authority of the Old and New Testaments, the *imago dei* of the human

being, and the doctrine of the fall of man which all stem

from Scriptural citation yet was strikingly absent where

comparable in Platonic thought.[62]

While it is inevitable that the early church fathers

were influenced by Greek thought, wrote in Greek and

some were converted from Hellenistic paganism, their anti-

platonic ideas stemming from their obvious appeals to

Scripture must take greater precedence over other

subservient influences Hellenistic or otherwise. Indeed,

should one not first consider the effects and influence of

Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 66:24 and Daniel

12:1-3 along with inter-testamental Jewish understandings

of hell such as seen in Ezra 4:7, and 1 Enoch 22:10-13, as

primary in informing the fathers doctrine in combination

with the New Testament teachings of Jesus on hell.

Certainly, it is much more probable that it was the

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[62] Robert W. Yarbrough, Jesus on Hell, in *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, eds. Morgan and Peterson, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 85-86.

Scriptures and the Lord Jesus, not Plato through
surreptitious historical influences that bequeathed the
discomfiting doctrine of hell to the church.[63] Such Platonic
argumentation seems to be a gasping for air in an ocean of
prominent historical evidence and immense Scriptural
citation.

Conditionalist's such as Fudge also relish claiming
the inappropriate and incorrect translation of the Koine
Greek language in the New Testament to account for the
long-lasting and misleading traditional doctrine of hell as
understood historically.[64] The word hell (Gr. *Gehenna*), as
translated in the New Testament in passages such as
Matthew 5:22-26, 29-30, is the ultimate difference between
the views of traditionalists and conditionalists (cf. also
Matt. 23:33). Fudge writes that, "Gerstner speaks for
traditionalists in saying that it [*Gehenna*] is a 'place of

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[63] Ibid., 87.
[64] Edward William Fudge, and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue*, 37-39.

everlasting burning'… [and] I speak for conditionalists and for most other annihilationists in saying it is a 'place of everlasting destruction'."[65] Here then are some of Jesus' first teachings about hell using the Greek word G*ehenna* and are key passages regarding this debate.

> Matthew 5:22-26 (HCSB)
> 22 But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Fool!' will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, 'You moron!' will be subject to hellfire. 23 So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you're on the way with him, or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 I assure you: You will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny!

> Matthew 5:29–30 (HCSB)
> 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that

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[65] Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, 122.

you lose one of the parts of your body than
for your whole body to be thrown into hell.
30 And if your right hand causes you to sin,
cut it off and throw it away. For it is better
that you lose one of the parts of your body
than for your whole body to go into hell!
                    Matthew 23:33 (HCSB)

33 "Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can you escape
being condemned to hell?

In regards to context in these verses, Preston Sprinkle aptly
writes in *Erasing Hell* that the phrase being "condemned to
hell" in Matthew 23:33 is reminiscent of something you
would hear in a courtroom.[66] Fudge picks up on this
judicial slant and writes regarding the contextual meaning
of these passages and the usage of G*ehenna* that, "the
debtor [in these passages] will never come out of prison
until he repays his debt in full, something that is
impossible, some traditionalists argue that the person who
goes to hell must suffer conscious torment forever. But
such reasoning is misguided".[67] Fudge here maintains the

[66] Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle, *Erasing Hell: What God
Said about Eternity, and the Things We've Made Up* (Colorado Springs:
David Cook, 2011), 76.
[67] Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes, 121*.

argument of fellow conditionalist Harold Guillebaud

towards his understanding of these verses in that, "A

prisoner who never comes out of prison does not live there

eternally. The slave who was delivered to the tormentors

till he should pay two million pounds would not escape

from them by payment, but he would assuredly die in the

end: why should not the same be at least a possibility in the

application?"[68] The conditionalist or annihilationist point

here is that Jesus, in these passages, is threatening the loss

of the total self or person (annihilation or extinction) in a

hell sentence, not an unending punishment in hell.[69]

Sprinkle also adds to this discussion in claiming that Jesus,

in almost every passage where He mentions hell, never

explicitly states that it will last forever.[70] Fudge and

Pinnock would agree with Sprinkle as Fudge would

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[68] Harold E. Guillebaud, *The Righteous Judge: A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Phoenix: Taunton U.K., n.d.), 21.

[69] Edward William Fudge, and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue*, 43.

[70] Chan and Sprinkle, *Erasing Hell: What God Said about Eternity, and the Things We've Made Up*, 81.

augment his argument over *Gehenna* in these verses stating

that it is little wonder that Jesus warned of God who can,

"who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt.

10:28).[71]

However, scholars such as Robert Yarbrough object

to these conditionalist suppositions and specifically

Fudge's here as he finds that Fudge and other

conditionalists are confusing the referent (the Valley of

Hinnon outside of Jerusalem) and the sense (a place of

extraordinary punishment prepared by God) in these

verses.[72] Yarbrough here seems to reflect that Fudge is

overly reliant upon the literalness of Jesus' use of this

metaphor, not understanding that Jesus is pointing to a

reality behind the metaphor.[73] This scholar (Yarbrough)

understands that a more plausible understanding is that,

"Jesus uses a despicable, disgusting, and harrowing

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[71] Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, 123.
[72] Yarbrough, *Hell under Fire*, 79.
[73] Ibid., 104-5.

geographical reference familiar to him and his listeners to warn of an eschatological destiny that his listeners should seek to avoid at all costs."[74] Yarbrough calls Fudge's loss of self a, "feeble psychologicalzation of an execrable state in comparison to which bodily mutilation and amputation is much to be preferred [and it] must be asked whether ultimate loss of consciousness can be taken seriously… [in light of] the awful outcome the Lord warns against."[75] Yet all scholars seem to indicate that the argument over the translation of *Gehenna* must be secured by studying the cumulative context of all the Scriptures involved in describing hell, especially when hell's duration is described with another Greek word meaning eternal (*aionios*), such as in Matthew 18:8-9; 25:46 and 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

The Meaning of Eternal (aionios)

> Matthew 18:8–9 (HCSB)
> 8 If your hand or your foot causes your downfall, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be

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[74] Ibid., 79.
[75] Ibid., 80.

thrown into the eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes your downfall, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, rather than to have two eyes and be thrown into hellfire!

Matthew 25:46 (HCSB)
46 And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 (HCSB)
9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from His glorious strength

One the major linguistic arguments made by those who stand against the traditional doctrine of hell derives from the supposed true meaning behind the Greek word *aionios*. Some maintain that it connotes that which pertains to the "age to come". Conditionalists such as Michael Green argues that this word, "does not primarily indicate unending quantity of life or death, but ultimate quality. It means life of the age to come or ruin for the age to come."[76] Philip Hughes, on the other hand, argues that

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[76] Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughdton, 1993), 73.

aionios can mean the permanent result of punishment rather than an ongoing eternal punishment. He writes concerning 1 Thessalonians 1:9 that, "everlasting life is existence that continues without end, and everlasting death is destruction without end, that is destruction without recall, the destruction of obliteration. Both life and death hereafter will be everlasting in the sense that both will be irreversible."[77]

However, Edward Fudge gives the most credence to the linguistic argument as he purports that *aionios* can have both a qualitative (pertaining to the age to come) or quantitative (unending in time) meaning depending on context.[78] Fudge finds the use of the word eternal here in the Matthean 18 passage as inconclusive as to meaning as the passage itself does not explain what the "eternal fire" will do to those thrown into it.[79] In fact, both Matthean

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[77] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 405.

[78] Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes, 11-20.*

[79] Ibid., 125.

passages simply state in Fudge's mind that the fire is eternal and comments nothing to the everlasting existence of those punished.[80] Pinnock offers the same sentiment in his view regarding these passages as he writes that, "Jesus does not define the nature of either of eternal life or of eternal death. He says there will be two destinies and leaves it there."[81] In relation to the passage in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, conditionalists such as Fudge contend that, "Throughout Scripture, the fire that symbolizes God's holiness destroys those who do not reverently respond to it…The wicked are 'punished' with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord"[82] In every case then, the usage of the word eternal (*aionios*) in the above verses is descriptive of the fire, and not the continual punishment of those sent there.

Regardless, conservative scholars find that these arguments span a range from a shallow inconclusiveness to a stark lack of poor scholarship. Christopher Morgan

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[80] Ibid.
[81] Pinnock, *Four Views on Hell*, 156.
[82] Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes, 11-20*, 195-96.

opposes the contention of the non-traditionalist position and remarks that even if *aionios* means the age to come, how long is the age to come?[83] Is this coming age not an everlasting, eternal age? Morgan clarifies that since Scripture repeatedly parallels the destinies of the righteous and unrighteous it seems most tenable that hell is equally eternal (Matt. 25:31-46).[84] Further, Morgan deflates the second argument by writing that, "The biblical portrait of the punishment of the wicked is often connected to their expulsion from the glorious presence of God (2 Thess. 1:5-10). Both punishment and separation from God require conscious existence."[85] Clearly, Morgan finds both conditionalist arguments regarding *aionios* inconclusive.

James Peterson, particularly in the case of Fudge, decries poor scholarship on his understanding of the Greek

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[83] Christopher Morgan, Annihilationlism: Will the Unsaved Be Punished Forever? in *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, eds. Morgan and Peterson, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004, 202.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 203.

word *aionios* in conjunction with nouns of action. Peterson laments that Fudge, "nor any conditionalists he has read, cites a single authority on linguistics…[he is] using a contrived argument to buttress his position."[86] He goes on to write that, "conditionalists' arguments based on the use of eternal with nouns of action leaves much to be desired. Conditionalists apparently have made up a set of categories: telic and atelic nouns. Can they cite legitimate linguistic authority for this? It appears to be a set of categories contrived to get around the Bible's teaching of everlasting punishment in Matthew 25:46 and everlasting destruction in 2 Thessalonians 1:9."[87] Veteran scholar and church statesmen John F. Walvoord found that the consistent placement of *aionios* alongside the duration of life of the godly lends itself to meaning "endless".[88] Walvoord even cites respected theologian W.R. Inge's

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[86] Fudge, and Peterson, *Two Views of Hell, 96.*
[87] Ibid., 98.
[88] Pinnock, *Four Views on Hell*, 24.

critical comment in *What is Hell* that, "No sound Greek scholar can pretend that *aionios* means anything less than eternal".[89]

However, perhaps theologian Preston Sprinkle concludes the argument over these passages in focusing on one passage in particular, when other passages are debatable. Sprinkle notes that Matthew 25:46 is contextually related to Matthew 25:41 citing that the "eternal punishment" of verse 46 is the "everlasting fire" of verse 41 prepared for the devil and his angels.[90] Therefore when compared with Revelation 19-20, it is certain that the punishment and the fire are everlasting as the devil and his angels are to be tormented "forever and ever".[91] In conclusion, Sprinkle, like Augustine, finds that the contrast between "eternal life" and "eternal punishment" in verse 46 is parallel, and therefore will never end.[92] As such, it would

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[89] Pinnock, *Four Views on Hell*, 6.
[90] Chan and Sprinkle, *Erasing Hell: What God Said about Eternity, and the Things We've Made Up*, 83.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 85.

appear that the traditionalist view of hell is the most

coherent when considering the Greek words for hell

(*Gehenna*) and eternal (*aionios).*

Finally, conditionalists, such as John Stott, argue

over a vocabulary of destruction in that, "It would seem

strange, therefore, if people who are said to suffer

destruction are in fact not destroyed; and as you put it, it is

difficult to imagine a perpetually inconclusive process of

perishing"[93] David Powys adds strongly that, "Destruction

is the most common way of depicting the fate of the

unrighteous within the Synoptic Gospels."[94] However,

Douglas Moo challenges the conditionalist understanding

of destruction language writing that,

> Definitive conclusions about the meaning of
> these words in each case are not easy to
> attain. But this much can be said: The words

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[93] David L. Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 316.

[94] David J. Powys, *Hell: A Hard Look at a Hard Question: The Fate of the Unrighteous in New Testament Thought* (Paternoster, U.K.: Carlisle, U.K., 1998), 284.

need not mean, "destruction" in the sense of "extinction". In fact, leaving aside for the moment judgment texts, none of the key terms usually has this meaning in the Old Testaments. Rather, they usually refer to the situation of a person or object that has lost the essence of its nature or function….The key words for "destroy" and "destruction" can also refer to land that has lost its fruitfulness (*olethros* in Ezek. 6:14; 14:16); to ointment that is poured out wastefully and to no apparent purpose (*apoleia* in Matt. 26:8; Mark 14:4); to wineskins that can no longer function because they have holes in them (*apollymi* in Matt. 9:17); to a coin that is useless because it is "lost" (*apollymi* in Luke 15:9); or to the entire world that "perishes," as an inhabited world, in the Flood (2 Pet. 3:6). In none of these cases do the objects cease to exist; they cease to be useful or exist in their original, intended state.[95]

Therefore the argument of destructive language appears strong only on the surface. Indeed, it would appear that the destructive terminology of the New Testament can at least afford the meaning of loss, ruin, or corruption rather than extinction.

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[95] Douglas J. Moo, "Paul on Hell", in *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment,* eds. Morgan and Peterson, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 104-5.

It would appear then that the arguments of the conditionalist regarding the Greek words translated hell (*Gehenna*) and eternal (*aionios*) along with the destructive language of the New Testament appear unconvincing. Yet when word hell (*Gehenna*) is considered in context, coupled with the information gleaned from passages utilizing the Greek word for eternal (*aionios*), the traditional doctrine of an eternal hell appears to have ascertained the upper hand. However, when judged with the additional historical understanding of the church, there appears to be no real contest between the concerted efforts and at times creative thinking of the conditionalist party. Invariably, the Scriptural, linguistic and historical attestation of the church regarding an eternal state known as hell has secured the better of the argument.

Conclusion

While there remains an intense debate in many theological halls regarding the doctrine of hell, this debate has now in some cases unfortunately spilled over into the

pew. Church members who are ill-equipped to handle certain scholarly declarations are now uncertain about the doctrine of hell and this has undoubtedly stifled their evangelistic zeal. However, it is hoped that this paper has reasonably and briefly defended the historical understanding of hell and has fairly considered the conditionalist argument, to some large degree discrediting it. The best arguments for the conditionalist doctrine of hell have been shown to be in some cases speculative, conjectural, questionable and in most cases largely inconclusive. Indeed, the lack of discernible and credible linguistic citation by the conditionalists coupled with their grasps to cite destructive language motifs or improper Hellenistic influences appear to wane in the light of the substantial evidence regarding traditional views of hell. Historically and Scripturally, the traditional view of an eternal hell seems undeniable in comparison to the conditionalist view. Therefore it is hoped that this traditional doctrine, when appropriately restored in the

lecterns and pulpits of professors and pastors alike, will rekindle the flames of evangelistic zeal and hell will indeed be under fire, not from liberal theologians, but from heavens army on earth, Christ's church.

Strengthening the Moral Argument

Adam Lloyd Johnson[1]

Introduction

The moral argument for God's existence has seen better

days. While it has never been as popular as the other

arguments for God, it is even less so today. Immanuel Kant

was perhaps the most substantial philosopher of the modern

period to champion the moral argument.[2] In fact, "his

argument set the agenda for virtually all later moral

arguments."[3] The real glory days of this argument were

"undoubtedly the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries."[4] The rampant growth of moral relativity in

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[2] George I. Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 213.

[33] Stephen T. Davis, *God, Reason and Theistic Proofs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 147.

[4] Davis, 147.

western culture has undoubtedly played a role in its fall from grace.

The moral argument has been well articulated recently by Robert M. Adams. I will begin here with a summary of his most basic, and strongest, form of the argument which he calls An Argument from the Nature of Right and Wrong.[5]

1. Morality is objective, "certain things are morally right and others are morally wrong."[6]
2. Objective morality is best explained by theism, "the most adequate answer is provided by a theory that entails the existence of God."[7]
3. Therefore, there is good reason to think theism is true, "my metaethical views provide me with a reason of some weight for believing in the existence of God."[8]

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[5] Robert M. Adams, "Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief," in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C.F. Delaney (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 116-140. Here he presents three moral arguments for God's existence. The other two are practical arguments which, in my view, are much weaker because they wade into the fallacy of wishful thinking. Yes, it is true that it would be demoralizing if morality was not objective, but that is not a satisfactory reason for believing it is. Objective morality should not be argued for on the basis of our desire for it.

[6] Adams, 116.

[7] Adams, 117.

[8] Adams, 117.

In this paper I will attempt to strengthen this argument by offering what I find to be the strongest case for both of his premises, introducing a possible rebuttal to both, and then defending them against their respective rebuttal.

The Strongest Case for Premise One, Morality is Objective

Belief in objective morality, also known as moral realism, is "the view that there are moral facts and true moral claims whose existence and nature are independent of our beliefs about what is right and wrong."[9] While morality cannot be independently and empirically tested, as is the case with science or mathematics, we, meaning myself and most all other human beings, all seem to have very similar strongly held beliefs that some things are really right and other things are really wrong. As Adams wrote, "so long as we think it reasonable to argue at all from grounds that are not

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[9] David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 7.

absolutely certain, there is no clear reason why such

confident beliefs, in ethics as in other fields, should not be

accepted as premises…"[10] These confidently held beliefs

are often referred to as intuitions.

Ethical intuitionism is the view that these beliefs are

self-evident and properly basic (they are not based on other

beliefs). "We intuitively–noninferentially,

prephilosophically–recognize the existence of some basic

moral values and first principles of morality that arise

naturally out of our own experience."[11] Thomas Reid is

well known for strongly advocating just such a common

sense epistemology. His "credulity principle (that we

should reasonably believe what is apparent or obvious to us

unless there are overriding reasons to the contrary, is

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[10] Adams, 117.

[11] Paul Copan, "Hume and the Moral Argument," in *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment*, ed. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 213-214.

appropriate with regard to our sense perceptions, our reasoning faculty and our moral intuitions."[12] If someone claimed not to recognize morality as objectively true in this manner, Reid quipped "I know not what reasoning, either probable or demonstrative, I could use to convince him of any moral duty."[13]

While intuitionism goes back to at least Thomas Aquinas, it is "with the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British moralists that the view as we know it now began to take shape."[14] During the early 20th century, it was strongly supported by British analytic philosophers such as Henry Sidgwick, G.E. Moore, H.A. Prichard, and W.D. Ross.[15]

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[12] Copan, 216.

[13] Thomas Reid, "Whether Morality Be Demonstrable," Essay 7 in *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, in *Works of Thomas Reid*, 2:381, quoted in Copan, 216.

[14] Robert Audi, *The Good in the Right: A Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 5.

[15] Brink, 2.

Because of their influence, intuitionism dominated moral philosophy during the first thirty years of the 20th century.[16]

　　According to Robert Audi, of all the proponents of intuitionism, Ross's explanation "is the primary one for the twentieth century and is still defended."[17] His presentation of intuitionism "is still widely regarded as a competitor with the best alternative contemporary moral theories."[18] Though morality cannot be proven empirically, he emphasized "that the prima facie moral duties are recognized in the same way as the truth of mathematical axioms and logical truths."[19] Intuitionism waned during the rise of logical positivism and naturalism in the 20th century but is becoming more popular again today. "Particularly in recent years, intuitionism has re-emerged as a major position in ethics…there has also been renewed exploration

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[16] Brink, 2.
[17] Audi, 5.
[18] Audi, 5.
[19] Audi, 29.

of intuitionism as an ethical theory that uses intuitions as data for moral reasoning and makes a basic commitment to the power of intuition as a rational capacity."[20]

Intuitionists maintain that morality cannot be verified in a scientific sense. Attempting to do so makes the "mistake of supposing the possibility of proving what can only be apprehended directly in an act of moral thinking."[21] Though they cannot be proven empirically, because they are self evident and properly basic, they are directly known to be true as soon as they are sufficiently comprehended. While such intuitions "are not infallible or indefeasible, we justifiably believe them in the absence of any overriding considerations or undercutting defeaters."[22] It is to such a possible defeater that I now turn.

A Possible Rebuttal to Premise One,

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[20] Audi, ix.
[21] H.A. Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" *Mind* 21 (1912); reprinted in his *Moral Obligation* (Oxford: clarendon Press, 1949), 16.
[22] Copan, 214.

Morality is Objective

David Hume was the first major modern critic of objective morality. He argued that moral judgments are subjective and not demonstrable; hence morality is essentially a human construct and does not reflect objective reality.[23] His argument fails overall because his declaration that we can only know what can be empirically proven cannot itself be empirically proven. Regardless, the view that morality is essentially a human invention has become more popular as more people have accepted the theory of evolution. Some proponents of evolution claim that our moral intuitions can simply be reduced to feelings, the germination of which can be explained through the process of natural selection.

Such proponents agree that nearly all people find themselves having strong feelings[24] of admiration and

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[23] Copan, 203.

[24] Virtually everyone agrees that feelings are included in our attitude towards morality. The question is, can our intuitions be simply reduced to such feelings?

appreciation towards some moral actions and feelings of anger and repulsion towards others. Of course, these feelings arise in us most powerfully when such actions are taken against us. We find these feelings to be held in common by the great majority of other people and cultures as well. They argue though that these feelings have just been programmed into us through an evolutionary process. For example, the anger we experience at the mere idea of killing babies is just an inner feeling which, for obvious reasons, was a beneficial trait that was then selected by nature. Through natural selection we have come to assign value to things that result in the survival of the fittest. Evolution then provides an explanation of where these collective moral feelings came from.

The cognitive dissonance we experience between selfish motives (what is best for me) and moral motions (what is best for others) is the balancing act between two survival instincts. To be entirely selfish would hinder

working together as a group, and clearly a cohesive group will always be able to out-compete even the strongest individual. On one hand then, it does provide survival benefit to work together well with a group. On the other hand, doing what is best for the group at all times would limit your individual survival, e.g. sacrificing yourself for the sake of the group. Though this may be very good for the group as a whole, for you it brings an abrupt end to all reproductive opportunities.

The consternation we feel then between what we call right and wrong is simply the tension inherent in the balance between wanting what is best for ourselves individually and what is best for the group we are a part of. Therefore morality is entirely conventional. According to these evolutionary proponents then, there are no objective moral truths; feelings of right and wrong have simply arisen accidently over the course of human evolution. We only have them because such an adaption has been of

evolutionary worth. In the end, morality has just been an aid to survival; ultimately objective morality is illusory.

Most have an initial knee jerk reaction against this conclusion because they hold moral concepts in such high regard. It is not rational however to continue believing that morality is objective just because we hold it dear and wish it to be so. In fact, we tightly hold on to this idea because "humans function better if they are deceived by their genes into thinking there is a disinterested objective morality binding upon them, which we should obey."[25] Those who hold this view do not necessarily advocate that people should reject their moral feelings or cease being moral, as morality is conventionally understood in whatever respective culture they happen to be a part of. Many, if not most, argue for robust moral living, either for utilitarian purposes or simply because it is still advantageous for your

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[25] Michael Ruse and Edward O. Wilson, "Moral Philosophy as Applied Science," *Philosophy* 61, no. 236 (April 1986): 179.

survival and reproductive chances. They simply believe

that there are no objectively true moral facts that are

externally true outside of our own subjective feelings and

relative preferences.

Could it be that maintaining objective morality as a

properly basic belief was legitimate in the past, but now, in

light of our modern understanding of evolution, this naïve

understanding is no longer appropriate? Should we

therefore not trust our intuitions to guide us to objective

truths? What else would such a position logically lead us

to? It is this epistemological issue that will be addressed

next.

A Defense of Premise One, Morality is Objective

Before I address this rebuttal, let me first say that it is not

profitable to accuse moral non-realists of being sociopaths.

Technically, sociopaths are people who lack moral feelings

altogether because they have no sense of responsibility or

social conscience. Though it may be possible in a public debate to make a non-realist look contemptible by pushing them into a corner where they have to admit they do not believe torturing babies is objectionably wrong, such emotionally charged tactics are not helpful if pursuing the truth in love is our goal.

Non-realists are just as repulsed as realists are at the thought of torturing babies. They want to express that agreement in the strongest possible sense they can. The difference is that they just do not believe that such repulsion comes from objective moral facts that exist outside of our own subjective opinions. To call such a person a sociopath is inflammatory language at best and a straw man tactic at worst. Moral realists and non-realists share the same moral intuitions and feelings, they only disagree on the basis for them. I think it is acceptable to warn people that the non-realist position is *potentially* more dangerous because it can provide justification for

someone's sociopathic tendencies. In addition, the non-realist position has no ultimate grounds to tell the sociopath that what he is doing is wrong. But these reasons by themselves are not sufficient to reject non-realism.

As for evolution then, one strategy would be to argue against the theory of evolution on purely scientific grounds. I myself do not find the case for evolution to be very strong and so I would be in favor of such a defense. But for the sake of argument, even if we grant that evolution, as it is commonly taught, is in fact true, this does not necessarily mean that morality is not objective.

Let us begin first with another but similar perception that evolution has supposedly resulted in – our sight. Just because a story can be told about how our eyes have evolved over time so that now we can now perceive real things such as trees, rocks, and other people, this in no way undermines our belief that the things we see are actually there, that they exist objectively outside our own thinking.

The same could just as well apply to our moral perception, i.e. our moral intuition. Let us say for the moment that evolutionary processes are to account for our ability to recognize moral truths; this in no way speaks to the veracity of those moral beliefs. Merely suggesting an evolutionary origin of our ability to perceive morality does not in and of itself discredit it from being objectively true.

This issue applies not only to our sensory perception but to all our cognitive faculties, if in fact they have resulted from evolution. The pertinent issue then is whether we think these cognitive processes, such as our sight perception and our moral intuitions, are aimed at the production of beliefs that are true or beliefs that are adaptive, but not necessarily true.[26] The problem is exacerbated by the fact that science itself cannot tell us

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[26] Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 151.

whether our cognitive faculties are truth-aimed or not. If they are not, we would never know any better because our own cognitive faculties are all we have to work with in order to prove the case.

If we conclude that our moral beliefs should not be trusted because they have come about through evolution, then to be consistent, this doubt should be similarly applied to all of our belief producing cognitive faculties. Charles Darwin understood the weight of this concern; he wrote "With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?"[27]

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[27] Letter to William Graham Down, July 3, 1881, in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, ed. Francis Darwin (London: John Murray, Abermarele Street, 1887), 1:315-16.

If we accept this evolutionary rebuttal then suddenly we find ourselves, if we are consistent, having to doubt all of our beliefs, even our beliefs about evolution itself. This is why some have argued philosophically that holding to naturalism (the idea that God does not exist) and evolution together is a self defeating position. Alvin Plantinga's summary of this problem is worth quoting in its entirety:

> First, the probability of our cognitive faculties being reliable, given naturalism and evolution, is low. (To put it a bit inaccurately but suggestively, if naturalism and evolution were both true, our cognitive faculties would very likely not be reliable.) But then according to the second premise of my argument, if I believe both naturalism and evolution, I have a *defeater* for my intuitive assumption that my cognitive faculties are reliable. If I have a defeater for *that* belief, however, then I have a defeater for *any* belief I take to be produced by my cognitive faculties. That means that I have a defeater for my belief that naturalism and evolution are true. So my belief that naturalism and evolution are true gives me a defeater for that very belief; that belief shoots itself in the foot and is self referentially incoherent; therefore I cannot rationally accept it.[28]

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[28] Plantinga, 314.

Most people believe our basic cognitive faculties to be truth-aimed and working properly. But if this evolutionary rebuttal is applied consistently, then we should not be so confident. It renders all our beliefs as purely subjective and potentially unreliable and there is no way for us to know if they are or not. Giving up our moral intuitions leads us logically to a truly crushing skepticism about all our beliefs. Therefore it is not rational to reject our intuitions about objective morality even if they have come to us through an evolutionary process.

Before I move onto the next premise, I would first like to clarify something. I have been arguing that, by itself, believing in an evolutionary explanation of our cognitive faculties, which include moral intuitions, should not necessarily cause someone to doubt the truthfulness of such intuitions. But, as Plantinga points out, if someone believed that our cognitive faculties were produced by evolution *and also* believed that God does not exist, then they should be

skeptical about the reliability of all of our cognitive

faculties, including our moral intuitions.

The Strongest Case for Premise Two, Objective Morality is Best Explained by Theism

The second premise claims that if morality is truly

objective, then it is more likely that God does exist than He

does not. This premise seems to me much stronger than the

first; at least it strikes me as more obviously true. "The

connection between God's existence and objective moral

values has been noted by even non-theistic thinkers of all

stripes."[29] If someone agrees that morality is objective then

you are well on your way to the argument's goal of

establishing theism. On the other hand, if a person strongly

maintains that morality is not objective, then the argument

is stuck in its tracks. This is not a weakness of the moral

argument per se; this is just the nature of argumentation.

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[29] Copan, 221. See for instance Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Kurtz, Richard Dawkins, and J.L. Mackie.

All I mean to say is that the first premise appears to me more difficult to establish than the second; thus it is important the first be thoroughly understood and accepted before continuing to the second.

C.S. Lewis teased this second premise out beautifully. He agreed with the intuitionists that objective morality is not something that can be proven empirically. But he argued that this is what should be expected if theism were true. Science, by definition, is unable to discover if there is anything behind the behaviors and appearances of things. If all we had were external observations, we would never become aware of this objective morality. "Anyone studying Man from the outside as we study electricity or cabbages, not knowing our language and consequently not able to get any inside knowledge from us, would never get

the slightest idea that we have this moral law."[30] We, as human beings, are different because we are not limited to this external perspective; we have an insider's view so to speak.

These intuitions lead us to conclude "that there is more than one kind of reality."[31] If morality is objective then this gives us good reason to believe there is more to the universe than just the material; it causes us to look for a non-natural foundation for these truths.

> We want to know whether the universe simply happens to be what it is for no reason or whether there is a power that makes it what it is. Since that power, if it exists, would not be one of the observed facts but a reality which makes them, no mere observation of the facts can find it… If there is a controlling power outside the universe, it could not show itself to us as one of the facts inside the universe – no more than the architect of a house could actually be a wall or staircase or fireplace in that house. The only way in which

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[30] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity and the Screwtape Letters: Complete in One Volume* (1952; repr., New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 23.

[31] Lewis, 20.

we could expect it to show itself would be inside
ourselves as an influence or a command trying
to get us to behave in a certain way.[32]

Therefore objective morality points us to a supreme moral

law-giver, one who transcends our universe.

**A Possible Rebuttal to Premise Two, Objective Morality
is Best Explained by Theism**

In his well known work "Religion and the Queerness of

Morality," George Mavrodes explained how odd objective

morality would be if there were no God. If our intuitions

are correct, if morality is truly an obligation and not just

feelings hoisted upon us by evolution, this objective

morality would be quite out of place in a universe without

God. Richard Taylor, clearly not a proponent of objective

morality, agrees. He wrote "the concept of moral obligation

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[32] Lewis, 24.

(is) unintelligible apart from the idea of God. The words remain, but their meaning is gone."[33]

Mavrodes admitted that the strongest reply against his position was the notion that objective morality was just a brute fact of the universe.[34] Why could it not be that objective morality just happens to be an ultimate fact, similar to 2+2=4? Theists have already agreed that morality is self-evident. If this is so, then there is no need to posit God as an explanation; moral objectivity just is and that is all that needs to be said. Some atheists take this very route to try and defeat premise two. For example, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong agrees that morality is objective but then maintains it is unnecessary for God to exist in order for us to know this fact.

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[33] Richard Taylor, *Ethics, Faith, and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 84.

[34] Mavrodes, 224.

In his debate with theist William Lane Craig, both Sinnott-Armstrong and Craig maintained that some actions (the example they used was rape) were just morally wrong. In this situation then the atheist fully agreed with the first premise, that morality is objective and self-evident. He claimed that if something is self-evident, then by very definition we do not have to give a reason for it. If it is objectively true, then it just is. If it is known self-evidently, then we do not need the concept of God to explain or defend it. Rape is just wrong because it is; and this is exactly what the theist is saying as well. Since rape is self-evidently wrong there is no need to go further and explain why it is.

If morality is objective then you do not need to posit God to know that it is, it just is by itself. Being a brute fact of the universe, there is no need to resort to the idea of God to explain it. "You don't need to add that humans were made in God's image or that we are His favorite species or

anything religious."[35] There is no need to posit the existence of God in order to know or justify that belief. A self-evident brute fact does not need an explanation; that is what it means to be self-evident. Atheists such as Sinnott-Armstrong argue that we do not need a basis for saying morality is objective if it is self-evident. They reject premise two because they think that if premise one can be granted without God, then the argument can end right there. If something is self-evident then it needs no further explanation.

Defending Premise Two, Objective Morality is Best Explained by Theism

When atheists claim it is sufficient to merely know that some moral actions are wrong, in this instance rape, they are confusing moral epistemology with moral ontology. Their rebuttal then only works at the level of knowing, not

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[35] Sinnott-Armstrong in Craig/Sinnott-Armstrong, 34.

the level of being. Craig responded simply by making this distinction and explaining that Sinnott-Armstong's mistake was to "think that our ability simply to see that rape is wrong implies that no account need be given of why rape is wrong."[36]

The difference is between knowing *that* something is and knowing *why* it is. Theists and atheists alike can know something is morally wrong self-evidently but explaining what actually makes it wrong is something else entirely. In other words, people can know *that* morality is objective, *that* rape is wrong, without appealing to God, but not *why* those things are so. This is the primary reason that theism provides a more fitting explanation for objective morality than atheism; not because it helps us know *that* morality is objective but because it provides an explanation for *why* it is.

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[36] Craig in Craig/Sinnott-Armstrong, 69.

This is a critical point to understand; theists do not claim that atheists are somehow inferior in their ability to recognize objective moral truths. In fact, they may even be superior in doing so at times. The Christian belief system teaches that we all possess this ability because God has placed this objective moral code within us (Rom. 2:14-15). Christians believe that everyone is able to "recognize the same sorts of moral values Christians can. Atheists don't need the Bible to recognize basic objective moral values. They have been created or constituted to be able to recognize them–even if they disbelieve. All humans are hard-wired the same way: they are made to function properly when living morally."[37] Being aware of objective moral truth is part of God's general revelation. As Lewis explained, it is one of the ways God communicates His existence to us.

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[37] Copan, 221.

What theists argue however is that atheists do not have a sufficient explanation as to *why* morality is objective. This is a more fundamental issue than merely knowing that morality is objective. It is not necessary to believe in the existence of God in order to apprehend moral truths but without God's existence there is no foundational basis to believe that they are objective. "They [atheists] do not have to believe in God to know right from wrong… [but their explanation of objective morality's] more fundamental level of being – that is, the actual ground or basis (which makes moral knowledge possible) – is inadequate."[38]

In contrast, theism provides a solid ontological explanation of objective morality because it posits a God who made us in His own image. The existence of God is "necessary to ground the instantiation of moral properties; his own existence as a personal Being instantiates these

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[38] Copan, 223.

properties, and by virtue of our creation in God's image, we human persons are further instantiations of these properties."[39] If we are truly God's image bearers, then by that fact alone we are endowed with greater worth and dignity. Only under theism are human beings intrinsically valuable.

If human beings have no more intrinsic significance than other animals, if we are say just a slightly higher form on the evolutionary chain, then morality has no more hold over us than it does over chimpanzees or insects. Within the belief system of atheism, when it is combined with a belief in evolution, there is no rational reason to think that the material atoms which make up human beings are more intrinsically valuable than any others, say of trees or rocks. Ultimately we have arisen from chance with no ultimate meaning beyond what we make up for ourselves. Copan

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[39] Copan, 224.

puts it well: "from valuelessness, valuelessness comes."[40] If

this were the case, killing the sick, handicapped, or the

elderly is really no different than putting down a sick dog.

Conclusion

Many believe morality is objective because they first

believe in theism. Theists often claim that God's nature is

the source of objective moral standards. The moral

argument attempts to run this process in reverse; beginning

with objective morality and from that concluding that God

must exist. For the argument to work then, objective

morality must be able to stand on its own. To do so, we

begin with an inner moral standard we all adamantly hold

others accountable to, as well as ourselves, although not as

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[40] Copan, 223.

consistently. Clearly there are some major cultural differences around the periphery – marriage practices, appropriate attire, and adolescent behavior just to name a few. At the core however, we all carry within us the same view that it is right to keep promises, wrong to tell lies, and reprehensible to torture babies for fun.

Even if these intuitions arose from an evolutionary process, this does not necessarily mean they are any less truth-aimed than our other cognitive faculties. Rejecting our properly basic intuitions carries with it a huge price; it leaves us floundering in complete skepticism about everything. If we accept morality as objective, we are then set on a pursuit to discover how this could be so. Because morality is not empirically ascertained, but intuited, we are led to look outside of nature for its source. It is not enough to simply know that it is objective; the more foundational question is "why is it objective?" The best explanation is that theism is true. If God exists as an infinite-personal

being, then His moral nature provides the ontological

foundation for morality.

Evaluating Objections to Carl F. H. Henry's Cognitive-Propositional Hermeneutic

William C. Roach[1]

Introduction[2]

Having presented an overview of Henry's analysis of epistemology, language, and hermeneutics;[3] the following article will focus on two negative responses to Carl F. H. Henry's "cognitive-propositionalist" hermeneutic.[4] In

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[1] William C. Roach, Ph.D. Adjunct professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, co-author of *Defending Inerrancy*, and editor of the *Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics*.

[2] It should be noted that Henry follows the two fold method of (1) Hermeneutics as epistemology and (2) Hermeneutics as methodology. Henry's cognitive-propositionalism is an example of his hermeneutic as epistemology, whereas the grammatical-historical method is an example of his hermeneutic as methodology. The cognitive-propositional hermeneutic describes Henry's view of epistemology *per se* and the relationship between epistemology and language.

[3] See William C. Roach, *Hermeneutics as Epistemology: A Critical Evaluation of Carl F. H. Henry's Epistemological Approach to Hermeneueutics* (Wipf and Stock: Forthcoming).

[4] This article is only going to discuss Henry's hermeneutic as epistemology. The reason it will only discuss Henry's hermeneutic is because the purpose of this book is to explore Henry's epistemology *per se* and his hermeneutic as epistemology. It also discusses his hermeneutics as methodology; however, it is assumed that if Henry's hermeneutics as epistemology is flawed, then his hermeneutic as methodology is flawed too. Second, it is because most of the criticisms

particular, it will investigate and respond to claims made by

Stanley Grenz, John Franke, and Alister McGrath, that

Henry's epistemology *per se* is a form of rationalism or

foundationalism.[5] All three of these scholars critique

Henry's view of propositional revelation too. However,

Kevin Vanhoozer offers a new critique of Henry's view of

cognitive-propositional revelation, and for that reason, his

criticisms will be explained in the section titled "cognitive-

propositionalism."[6] This article will: (1) Present Grenz,

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are leveled against Henry's cognitive-propositionalism, not his use of the grammatical-historical method.

[5] These scholars like Robert Webber use the terms "rationalism" and "foundationalism" interchangeably. In his book, *The Younger Evangelicals*, Webber traces the historical background of foundationalism to Enlightenment foundationalism. He believes that Henry's epistemology is derived from rationalism and a result of foundationalism (again, terms he uses interchangeably). Webber believes that Henry's cognitive-propositional method illustrates the rationalist method best. He suggests that Henry's insistence on a literal interpretation of Scripture is an overflow of his epistemology and view of propositional revelation. Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 94–98.

[6] The reason this section will only investigate the claims that Henry is a modernist and/or rationalist and his view of propositional revelation is because those are the two most pertinent critiques of his view. Others such as R. C. Sproul and John Gerstner have charged Henry with being a fideist; however, this claim applies to his overall

Franke, McGrath, and Vanhoozer's charges against

Henry's epistemology and cognitive-propositionalism; and

(2) It will attempt to analyze and refute the charges that

Henry's epistemology *per se* and cognitive-

propositionalism is a form of rationalism or

foundationalism.

Epistemology *Per Se*

The first criticism presented against Henry's method comes

from postmodern theologians Stanley Grenz and John

Franke. Not only do they use postmodernism to criticize

Henry's epistemology *per se*, Grenz and Franke also use it

to criticize his hermeneutic as epistemology and

methodology too. In their book titled, *Beyond*

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apologetic methodology not his hermeneutic as epistemology or methodology. Furthermore, some charge Henry with not being modern enough for not endorsing contemporary forms of biblical exegesis. Many of these critiques label Henry as a modernist who works out that method into his overall hermeneutic approach. However, this is merely another way of labeling Henry as a rationalist.

Foundationalism, Grenz and Franke label Henry as a foundationalist.[7] They claim,

> In the mid-twentieth century, the classic Protestant scholastic approach to theology found an able advocate in the renowned evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry. Henry asserts that the sole foundation of theology rests on the presupposition that the bible [sic], as the self-disclosure of God, is entirely truthful in propositional form. Therefore, the task of theology is simply 'to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole.'[8]

According to Grenz and Franke, Henry's method is in the scholastic theological tradition that understands the Bible

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[7] Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 7, 14, 61. The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines foundationalism as, "The view in epistemology that knowledge must be regarded as a structure raised upon secure, certain foundations. These are found in some combinations of experience and reason, with different schools (empiricism, rationalism) emphasizing the role of one over the other. Foundationalism was associated with the ancient Stoics, and in the modern era with Descartes, who discovered his foundationalism in the 'clear and distinct' ideas of reason." See Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994),145

[8] Ibid., 14.

primarily as rational and cognitive- propositional revelation.[9] They claim A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield are the historic advocates of this rational view of Scripture. Grenz and Franke believe the scholastic approach views the Bible as primarily a storehouse of theological facts with a collection of true statements. Unsurprisingly, Grenz and Franke believe Henry's approach is a recapitulation and a throwback to pre-Enlightenment epistemology and theology. They claim that the hermeneutical methods of scholastic theologians, the Princetonians, and Henry are ultimately based on rationalist epistemologies.[10]

The second criticism against Henry's method comes from Alister McGrath, who affirms a critical-realist epistemology and believes Henry's methodology (e.g., epistemology *per se*, hermeneutic as epistemology, apologetic methodology and so forth) has been influenced

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[9] Ibid., 61.
[10] Ibid.

by rationalism.[11] McGrath also believes that Henry and

other American evangelicals, such as John Warwick

Montgomery, Francis Schaeffer and Norman Geisler, have

been influenced by Princetonian rationalism were

continuing the epistemological preconceptions of

rationalistic philosophy.[12] McGrath claims Henry is the

main representative of this trend. He writes,

> Thus even Carl Henry can offer such
> hostages to fortune as his affirmation of
> belief in a 'logically consistent divine
> revelation.' In the end, Henry risks making an
> implicit appeal to a more fundamental
> epistemological foundation in his affirmation
> of the authority of Scripture, leading to the
> conclusion that the authority of Scripture
> itself is derived from a more fundamental

[11] Alister McGrath, *A Passion For Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 106. He traces the rationalistic spirit in American evangelicalism through the Princetonian use of "Scottish-realism" or "Common-sense philosophy." The effect has been that American evangelicalism has responded to theologies like neo-orthodoxy and created an apologetic that stresses the informational content of revelation. Ibid., 106. McGrath claims, "The result is that forms of American evangelicalism which have been especially influenced by rationalism, such as that associated with Carl Henry, have laid too much emphasis upon the notion of a purely propositional biblical revelation." Ibid.
    [12] Ibid., 170.

authority. Thus for Henry, 'without noncontradiction and logical consistency, no knowledge whatever is possible.'[13]

McGrath believes the danger of Henry's approach is it reduces Scripture to a type of "code book." It makes the truth of divine revelation dependent on fallen human reason. McGrath claims that evangelicalism cannot allow revelation to be imprisoned by fallen reason. It cannot allow the extra-biblical use of evangelical rationalism to validate or judge the Scriptural witness.[14] McGrath attempts to trace the effects of this type of rationalist approach back to the early church. He believes that Tertullian pointed out the danger of this rational method.[15]

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] McGrath uses the Christological debates to illustrate his point. He claims, "Those criticisms that the incarnation is illogical] were intensified at the time of the Enlightenment, with many critics of traditional Christianity following Spinoza in declaring that talk of Jesus as being both God and man made about as much logical sense as talking about a square circle. Henry renders evangelicalism intensely– and needlessly–vulnerable at this point. Indeed, some evangelicals have even developed 'one-nature' Christologies in response to the rationalist pressure, here endorsed by Henry, to conform to 'logic', despite the

It seems like McGrath is trying to claim that Henry's use of rationalist ideals renders evangelicalism to affirm heretical positions in order to preserve "logic." This is said in such a way so as to convey the idea that "logic is the supreme authority over divine revelation."[16] However, as will be seen later; McGrath, much like Kevin Vanhoozer, seems to be misreading Henry and possibly reading him in the worst possible light.[17]

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seriously unorthodoxy consequences of this move. Yet why should evangelicals feel under any such pressure to conform to the highly questionable dictates of fallen human reason? And how often has it been pointed out, even by secular philosophers, that 'logic is the enemy of truth'?" Ibid., 171.

[16] However, what is McGrath's response to the notion of logical consistency and divine revelation? McGrath claims, "If divine revelation appears to be logically inconsistent on occasion (as it undoubtedly does: witness the doctrine of the two natures of Christ), this cannot be taken to mean that the doctrine in question is wrong, or that the doctrine is not divine revelation on account of its 'illogical' character. Rather, this merely illustrates the fact that fallen human reason cannot fully comprehend the majesty of God. This point was made regularly by Christian writers as diverse as Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin." Ibid.

[17] Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 107.

"Evangelicalism," according to McGrath, "if it were to follow Henry's lead at this juncture, would set itself on the road that inevitably allows fallen human reason to judge God's revelation, or become its ultimate foundation."[18] McGrath believes evangelicalism cannot go down this road, even if it did at one point and time offer a short-term apologetic advantage within the culture of the Enlightenment worldview. He goes on to say, "Today, evangelicalism is free to avoid the false lure of foundationalism, and to maintain the integrity of divine revelation on its own terms and in its own categories. Let Scripture be Scripture!"[19] McGrath returns to Henry, suggesting he has fallen prey to the rationalist ideals characteristic of the Enlightenment. He writes,

> The theological style adopted by Henry also gives the impression of preferring to deal with general principles or 'objective facts' (a characteristic Enlightenment notion) rather

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[18] McGrath, *A Passion For Truth*, 171.
[19] Ibid., 172.

than with the historical narrative of revelation. Henry insists, in true Enlightenment fashion, that each and every aspect of the Bible may be reduced to first principles or logical axioms. 'Regardless of the parables, allegories, emotive phrases and rhetorical questions used by these [biblical] writers, their literary devices have a logical point which can be propositionally formulated and is objectively true or false.' Henry adopts an approach which Hans Frei discerned as characteristic of rationalism: the extraction of logical propositional statements from an essentially narrative piece of writing.[20]

McGrath seems to propose that Henry's hermeneutic as epistemology has been taken hostage by Enlightenment philosophy. In turn, his doctrine of divine propositional revelation and hermeneutics as methodology are the logical extensions of these rationalistic ideals.[21]

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

Cognitive-Propositionalism

Kevin Vanhoozer, another generally speaking critical-realist, concurs with the claim that Henry affirms the Enlightenment philosophy of A. A. Hodge. In his address to the Evangelical Theological Society, Vanhoozer wrote an article titled, "Lost In Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics."[22] In that article, he includes a section titled, "'*Mining the deposit of truth': The Hodge-Henry hypothesis*."[23] In his book titled, *The Drama of Doctrine,* Vanhoozer claims that Henry's type of cognitive-

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[22] Kevin Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation: Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *JETS* 48, no. 1 (2005): 89–114. Vanhoozer claims, "In the big geopolitical picture, postliberals and evangelicals are allies: postliberals are generously orthodox, trinitarian, and Christocentric. But they are not so sure about us. Hans Frei, for example, worries that Carl Henry is a closet *modernist* because of his commitment to truth as historical factuality. For Frei, it is the biblical narrative itself, not its propositional paraphrase, that is the truth-bearer. Whereas for Henry doctrines state the meaning of the narratives, for Frei we only understand the doctrine by understanding the story. Emergent evangelicals have similar questions about their conservative counterparts. Raschke, for example, says, 'Inerrantism amounts to the rehellenizing of the faith and a retreat from the Reformation.'" Ibid., 99–100.

[23] Ibid., 94, Italics in original.

propositionalism characterizes not only Aquinas, but also the scholastic tradition, the Princetonians, and older forms of evangelicalism (e.g., what Thornbury labels as "classic evangelicalism").[24] He goes on to note,

> Carl F. H. Henry's magisterial defense of propositional revelation follows in the same tradition. He defines a proposition as 'a verbal statement that is either true or false.' The Scripture, says Henry, contain a divinely given body of information actually expressed or capable of being expressed in propositions. Those parts of the Bible that are not already in the form of statements may be paraphrased in propositional form. In Henry's words: 'Christian theology is the systematization of the truth-content explicit and implicit in the inspired writings.' In what we may call the Hodge-Henry (H-H) hypothesis, doctrine is the result of biblical induction and deduction, a capsule summary of the meaning of Scripture 'taken as a set of propositional statements, each expressing a divine affirmation, valid always and everywhere.' Propositionalist theology tends to see Scripture in terms of revelation, revelation in terms of conveying information, and

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[24] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 267.

theology in terms of divine information-processing.[25]

Vanhoozer represents the H-H hypothesis as a view that portrays language as a "*Correspondence as a picture relation.*"[26] That term means the H-H hypothesis is primarily concerned with stating truth, which in turn is a function of describing and representing the world.[27] He critiques the H-H view of language for its similarities to Wittgenstein's picture theory of language. Vanhoozer believes both approaches fail to account for the ways people *use* language, and finally ". . . in seeking propositional restatements of Scripture it [cognitive-propositionalism] implies that there is something inadequate about the Bible's own forms of language and

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[25] Vanhoozer, "Lost In Interpretation," 95.

[26] Ibid, Italics in original.

[27] Ibid. Vanhoozer claims, "Meaning here becomes largely a matter of ostensive reference, a matter of indicating objects or statements of affairs. The biblical text is a mirror of nature, history, and even eternity to the extent that I can state universal truths about God's being." Ibid.

literature."[28] Vanhoozer calls for evangelicalism to move

beyond this type of "molecular hermeneutics."[29] He claims

that *texts* are not simply bundles of propositions, but new

kinds of entities with emergent properties.[30] Vanhoozer's

main problem with the H-H hypothesis and the picture

theory of meaning is it seems inadequate for *textual*

meaning.[31]

Vanhoozer suggests Henry claims that those parts

of the Bible that are not already in propositional statements,

may be summarized in propositional form.[32] He praises

Henry for desiring to stress the cognitive content of

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[28] Ibid., 96.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Vanhoozer claims in the corresponding footnote, "Henry comes close to what literary critics call the 'heresy of propositional paraphrase' when he suggests that the truth expressed in literary forms such as poetry and parable may be expressed in 'declarative propositions' (*God, Revelation & Authority*, 3.463). Even speech acts such as promising and commanding can be 'translated into propositions' (p. 477). Such paraphrases and translations are necessary because 'the primary concern of revelation is the communication of truth' (p. 477)." Ibid., 95, fn. 21.

Scripture; however, Vanhoozer believes his insistence on

the complete propositional nature of special revelation does

not do justice to the Bible's various genres. Vanhoozer

agrees with the claim that Henry advocates a version of the

"heresy of propositional paraphrase."[33] He suggests Henry

preserved the propositional nature of revelation due to a

fear that theologians might utilize theories of interpretation

to "neutralize" inerrancy.[34]

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[33] Vanhoozer claims in the corresponding footnote, "Henry comes close to what literary critics call the 'heresy of propositional paraphrase' when he suggests that the truth expressed in literary forms such as poetry and parable may be expressed in 'declarative propositions' (*God, Revelation & Authority*, 3.463). Even speech acts such as promising and commanding can be 'translated into propositions' (p. 477). Such paraphrases and translations are necessary because 'the primary concern of revelation is the communication of truth' (p. 477)." Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation," 95, fn. 21.

[34] Ibid., 97. Vanhoozer claims, "The Lausanne Covenant (1974) and the Chicago Statement (1978) use similar formulations to define biblical inerrancy, the one saying the Bible is 'without error in all that it affirms,' the other that 'it is true and reliable in all matters it addresses' (Art. XI). Strictly speaking, however, 'it' neither affirms nor addresses; *authors* do. Interestingly, Carl Henry worries that too great a focus on authorial intention detracts from inerrancy, since 'some commentators seem to imply that the biblical writers need not always have intended to teach truth.' for example, does the author of Josh 9:13 intend his statement about the sun standing still to contradict a heliocentric world view? Was Melanchthon right to attack Copernicus

Vanhoozer believes the way forward for evangelicalism is not to retreat to propositionalist theology, but to find out the *kind* of truth the Bible has and *how* it speaks about truth.[35] Vanhoozer interacts with Henry at this point suggesting,

> Carl Henry was absolutely right to stress the cognitive content of Scripture and doctrine over against those who sought to make revelation a non-cognitive experience. Is it possible, however, that in so focusing on biblical *content* he, and other conservative evangelicals, have overlooked the significance of biblical literary *form*? We shall return to this point below. The immediate point is this: of all theological traditions, evangelicals must respect the nature of the biblical books they interpret. It is no service to the Bible to make a literary-category mistake. At least on this point, I agree with James Barr: 'Genre mistakes cause the *wrong kind of truth values* to be attached to the biblical sentences.' The dialogue between conservative and emergent evangelicals could be helped by a recognition

for suggesting that it is the earth, not the sun, that moves?" Ibid., 106, Italics in original.
    [35] Ibid., 100.

of the cognitive significance of Scripture's literary forms.[36]

In the end, Vanhoozer believes speech-act-theory offers evangelicals a more theologically robust and coherent corrective to the propositionalist theologies of Hodge and Henry.[37]

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[36] Ibid, Italics in original. Immediately following these remarks Vanhoozer claims, "To interpret the Bible truly, then, we must do more than string together individual propositions like beads on a string. This takes us only so far as fortune cookie theology, to a practice of breaking open Scripture in order to find the message contained within. What gets *lost* in propositionalist interpretation are the circumstances of the statement, its poetic and affective elements, and even, then, a dimension of its truth. We do less than justice to Scripture if we preach and teach only its propositional content. Information alone is insufficient for spiritual formation. We need to get beyond 'cheap inerrancy,' beyond ascribing accolades to the Bible to understanding what the Bible is actually saying, beyond professing biblical truth to *practicing* it." Ibid., Italics in original.

[37] Vanhoozer suggests that speech acts are able to understand better whether or not the authors intended their sentences to be assertive, factual, commanding, etc. Vanhoozer points out that Henry was leery of suggesting that the biblical authors did not always intend to teach truth. Ibid., 107. However, Vanhoozer suggests, "*The cognitive contribution of literary forms: the literary sense is the literal sense.*" Ibid., Italics in original. Vanhoozer interprets this statement to mean, "The Bible proposes things for our consideration not just via individual assertions but in 'many and diverse ways' that derive from its diverse literary forms (as well as from its diverse illocutionary forces, as we have just seen). The form of what Scripture says is not merely incidental to its truth." Ibid.

Vanhoozer labels himself as a "modified propositionalist."[38] He desires to recognize the cognitive significance not only of statements and propositions, but of *all* the Bible's figures of speech and literary forms.[39] Vanhoozer believes his approach resists the temptation to "dedramatize—to de-from" the biblical text in order to abstract a revealed truth.[40] He concludes by saying, "My approach to theology—call it 'postconservative'—does not deny the importance of cognitive content, but it does resist privileging a single form—the propositional statement—for expressing it."[41] Vanhoozer calls for a new understanding of biblical inerrancy, where the *literal* sense is understood to be the *literary* sense.[42] He distinguishes his view of inerrancy from the "cheap inerrancy" view of Henry and

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[38] Ibid. See chapter three of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* for Henry's response to Vanhoozer like approaches that attempt to diminish or deny the plenary cognitive status of divine revelation.

[39] Ibid., 107–108.

[40] Ibid., 108.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

the Chicago Statements on Biblical Inerrancy and

Hermeneutics.[43]

Analysis of Negative Responses

Now that Grenz, Franke, McGrath, and Vanhoozer, have

been able to level their charges against Henry's method, it

is time to evaluate their claims.[44] This second section will

respond to their charges by analyzing four areas of Henry's

epistemology and cognitive-propositionalist method: (1) It

will analyze different views on faith and reason to show

that Henry is not a rationalist; (2) It will: (a) analyze the

secondary sources that defend Henry against the claim that

he is a rationalist; (b) explore Henry's self-testimony that

he adheres to an Augustinian epistemology vs. a Cartesian

form of rationalism, and explain his criticisms of

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[43] Ibid., 108–109.
[44] These claims come from the scholarly publications listed
above.

rationalism; (3) It will analyze the claim that Henry is a classic (e.g., Cartesian) foundationalist; and (4) It will analyze the charges leveled against Henry's cognitive-propositionalism.

Faith and Reason

Norman L. Geisler and Paul Feinberg in their book titled, *Introduction to Philosophy*, explain rationalism and how it interacts with different views of faith and reason.[45] In their chapter titled, "The Relationship Between Faith and Reason," They offer five different solutions to the debate on the relationship between faith and reason.[46] Geisler and Feinberg note, "The solutions to the issue of which method

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[45] Geisler and Feinberg claim, "At the heart of rationalism is the contention that the sources and justification of our beliefs is to be found in reason alone. The rationalist attempt to arrive at apodictic (incontestable) first truths or principles." See Norman L. Geisler and Paul Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 110, Italics in original.

[46] They claim, "'Revelation' is a supernatural disclosure by God of truth which could not be discovered by the unaided powers of human reason. 'Reason' is the natural ability of the human mind to discover truth." Ibid., 255.

is a reliable source of truth are divisible into five basic

categories: (1) revelation only; (2) reason only; (3) reason

over revelation; (4) revelation over reason; and (5)

revelation and reason."[47] These five solutions offer a

paradigm to explain the relationship of rationalism and

varying views of faith and reason.

One possible objection against the researcher's

proposed method for defending Henry against the charge

that he is a rationalist is Henry does not use Geisler and

Feinberg's categories of faith and reason. While it is true

Henry never *explicitly* utilizes Geisler and Feinberg's five

categories to discuss faith and reason, however, a thorough

reading of his books (especially *Toward a Recovery*),

indicate that Henry does employ *similar* categories to

discuss and analyze faith and reason.[48] That being said, the

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Carl F. H. Henry, *Toward A Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990). For example: (1) **Revelation only**, Henry claims, "More properly labeled as fideists are Soren Kirkegaard

following section is going to: (1) Briefly allow Geisler and
Feinberg to explain these five categories of faith and
reason; and (2) Use Geisler and Feinberg's categories of
faith and reason to show that Henry does not affirm a
rationalist method or rationalist view of faith and reason;
instead, he is Augustinian in his method and approach to
faith and reason.

Geisler and Feinberg list Sören Kierkegaard as the
main advocate of the "**revelation only**" approach. They

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and certain Neo-orthodox theologians who dismiss public reason and
rational tests as irrelevant to religious truth claims." (Ibid., 39); (2)
Reason only, Henry claims, "The negative impulse of the
Enlightenment aimed to promote human reason by stifling supernatural
revelation" (Ibid., 70). (3) **Reason over revelation**, Henry claims, "But
the Enlightenment managed to suffocate both reason and revelation,
instead of recognizing that reason is the alley and not the enemy of
divine revelation" (Ibid.); (4) **Revelation over reason**, Henry claims, ".
. . but equally much with the so-called Tertullian formula *credo quia
absurdum* ('I believe what is absurd'). The modern Neo-orthodox
revival of Tertullian's slogan was not unrelated to existentialist
insistence on the ultimate absurdity of the world, a notion that is neither
biblical nor evangelical." (Ibid., 40, Italics in original); (5) **Revelation
and reason**, Henry claims," One must contrast the Augustinian
formula *credo ut intellegam* ('I believe in order to understand') not
only with Thomas Aquinas's formula ('I understand in order to
believe') . . ." (Ibid., Italics in original).

claim, "According to Sören Kierkegaard (1813–1855), the father of modern existentialism, the human is wholly incapable of discovering any divine truth." [49] Karl Barth is the second example of the "revelation only" approach, who like Kierkegaard, argues that God is "Wholly Other" and can be known only by divine revelation.[50] The second view they list is the "**reason only**" approach. They list Immanuel Kant and Benedict Spinoza as the main advocates of this view. These two philosophers did not believe that anything about God was known by revelation; instead, only reason is the final test for religious truth. Geisler and Feinberg note that Kant went so far as to claim agnosticism about the knowledge of God. Geisler and Feinberg list the Alexandrian Fathers and Modern Higher Criticism as advocates of the "**reason over revelation**" approach. For example, they claim, "Justin Martyr believed in divine

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[49] Geisler and Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 256.
[50] Ibid., 258.

revelation, but in addition to the Bible he held that 'reason

is implanted in every race of man.' In view of this he held

that those among the ancient Greeks who 'lived reasonably

are Christians, even though they have been thought

atheists.' This included men such as Heraclitus and

Socrates."[51]

The fourth view is the "**revelation over reason**"

approach. They list Tertullian and Cornelius Van Til as the

two main advocates of this method.[52] Geisler and Feinberg

claim,

> Perhaps the best example among
> contemporary evangelical thinkers of one
> who exalts revelation over reason is the
> Reformed theologian and apologist,
> Cornelius Van Til (b. 1895). His view is often
> called *presuppositionalism* because it
> strongly stresses the need to 'presuppose' the
> truth of revelation in order for reason to
> function. For if there were no God—who
> created and sustains the very laws and
> processes of reason, then thinking itself
> would be impossible. Reason, for Van Til, is

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[51] Ibid., 261.
[52] Ibid., 262–263.

radically and actually dependent on revelation.[53]

The final view Geisler and Feinberg list is the "**revelation and reason**" approach. They claim Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas are the main advocates of this method. Geisler and Feinberg note that Augustine attempts to reason about, within, and for revelation; but never against it.[54]

With these categories in place, it helps to set the stage for a discussion of the charge that Henry is a

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[53] Ibid., 263., Italics in original.

[54] Ibid., 265. Geisler and Feinberg explain Augustine's two steps in his approach to faith and reason. First, "*Faith is understanding's step.*" Ibid., 265. They claim, "Without faith one would never come to a full understanding of God's truth. Faith initiates one into knowledge. In this sense, Augustine fully believed that faith in God's revelation is prior to human reason. On the other hand, Augustine also held that no one ever believes something before he has some understanding of what it is he is to believe." Ibid. Since Augustine believed that faith is prior to reason, Geisler and Feinberg label his view as "revelation *and* reason." Ibid., Italics in original. Second, "*Understanding is faith's reward.*" Ibid. They claim, "The reward for accepting God's revelation by faith is that one has a fuller and more complete understanding of truth than he could have otherwise." Ibid., Italics in original. For example, Augustine argues for the existence of God that starts from the minds knowledge of immutable truths to an Immutable God.[54] In brief, for Augustine, faith is a prerequisite to have a full understanding of God's revelation; however, human reason and revelation operate in accordance with one another.

rationalist. It seems like the charges labeled against Henry

claim he is advocating for either the "reason only" or

"reason over revelation" approaches. However, there is no

warrant for this claim in any of Henry's writings.[55]

Moreover, just because Henry labels himself as a

presuppositionalist and argues for a deductive method, does

not entail that he is a rationalist. It should be noted that in

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[55] Geisler and Feinberg note that a rationalist approach seeks justification in reason alone. Methodologically, rationalists operate from a certain starting point and deduce all other truths about reality. Furthermore, in the five different views of faith and reason, it is becomes apparent that the "reason only" and "reason over revelation" approaches were the only two that seem to meet the rationalist definition and methodological criteria. These approaches either downplayed or degraded the role of revelation in light of the authority of reason. The "revelation over reason" approach of Cornelius Van Til seems to operate according rationalist methodology, in that it allows for a certain starting point, and it allows for a deductive method. However, it does not meet the rationalist definition because it does not claim that reason is superior or degrades revelation; instead, revelation is superior and even degrades fallen human reason. The "revelation and reason" approach still allows for certain starting points and a deductive method. It allows for humanity to base their knowledge as the starting point of revelation and in rational categories. Human thinking is able to make inferences to the nature of God, and deductions from the nature of truth to the existence of God. However, reason does not trump revelation, and revelation does not override reason. Geisler and Feinberg suggest, "'Revelation and reason' . . . properly assigns a role to each and shows their interrelationship. One should reason about and for revelation, otherwise he has an unreasonable faith. Likewise, reason has no guide without a revelation and flounders in error." Ibid., 270.

chapter two on Henry's epistemology the second principle of his approach is, "Human reason is a divinely fashioned instrument for recognizing truth; it is not a creative source for truth."[56] Rationalist approaches on the other hand argue that reason is the creative source for truth, even determining the validity of divine revelation.[57] Henry dismisses the claim that an appeal to rationale and use of the laws of logic is a form of rationalistic philosophy.[58] He criticizes rationalism, claiming, "What is objectionable about rationalism is not reason, however, but human reasoning deployed into the service of premises that flow from arbitrary and mistaken postulations about reality and truth."[59]

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[56] Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (6 vols.; Waco: Word Books, 1976–1983), 2:223. He emphatically favors the necessity of rationale within a Christian worldview. Henry's insists on rationale to the point in which he claims, "The Christian faith emphasizes that one has nothing to gain and everything to lose by opposing or downgrading rationality." Ibid., 2:225

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 2:226.

[59] Ibid.

Henry neither resembles the definition of the rationalist method, nor does his method come to the same conclusions of Kant and Spinoza or the Alexandrian Fathers and Higher Critics (e.g., the two examples listed by Geisler and Feinberg of the "reason only" and "reason over revelation" approaches).[60] Henry's method may utilize a deductive approach; however, it is grounded within a revelational theistic framework, in which the two axioms are the existence of God and the Bible as the starting points of all theology. If anything, Henry's method has a different starting point in that it does not allow for reason to override revelation, however, it does not allow for revelation to override reason. Instead, his method argues for the compatibility of faith and reason. In the end, much like his epistemological forefather in the faith; Henry, like Augustine, develops a method in which faith utilizes and

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[60] Ibid.

harmoniously employs reason, not one in which reason is the creative source for all truth.

Rationalism and Augustinianism

G. Wright Doyle has an entire chapter in his book responding to the charge that Henry is a rationalist.[61] He alludes to M. J. Ovey, who claims that "rationalism" still carries many negative overtones in many communities. Doyle distinguishes between rationalism and a commitment to being rational, with the latter being the process of providing reasons for ones beliefs and a commitment to the

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[61] He cites C. Stephen Evans, who claims, "Rationalism has been defined as a 'conviction that reason provides the best or even the only path to truth. . . . In theology the term rationalism often designates a position that subordinates revelation to human reason or rules out revelation as a source of knowledge altogether.'" G. Wright Doyle, *Carl Henry Theologian for All Seasons: An Introduction and Guide to Carl Henry's God, Revelation, and Authority* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010), 107. See Stephen C. Evans, "Approaches to Christian Apologetics," in *new Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (eds. W. C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin J. McGrath; Downers Grove: InterVaristy, 2006), 98–99.

validity of the laws of logic.[62] He suggests some scholars

understand rationalism to be a view claiming that human

reason is the supreme and only means of arriving at truth,

divine truth included. Furthermore, they understand

rationalism to be a sterile, passionless, anti-supernatural

method, contrary to Christian theism and the Bible as

divine revelation.[63] Doyle claims, "When Henry's

opponents brand his theological method as 'rationalism,'

they score a rhetorical victory without really having to

substantiate their charge."[64] He believes if Henry's critics

can merely associate his approach with a "rationalist"

method, they have already won the rhetorical battle. Doyle

offers three reasons why Henry is not a rationalist:

> *1. Carl Henry's thought does not fit in any sense the standard definitions of rationalism given above.* That is, he does not believe that reason alone can ascertain ultimate truth; he does not give reason priority over God's revelation in the Bible; he does not believe

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[62] Doyle, *Carl Henry*, 108.
[63] Ibid., 108–109.
[64] Ibid., 109.

that rational evidence alone will persuade anyone to believe in Christ. . . . *2. Some of the charges of a sort of 'Christian rationalism' leveled against Henry by fellow Christians seem to be based either on ignorance of misunderstanding*. Even a cursory reading of *God, Revelation, and Authority* will show they lack foundation. *3. It seems to me that accusations that Henry is a 'rationalist' sometimes proceed from premises that are false or internally contradictory*.[65]

Doyle goes on to explain his second objection by appealing to the fact that in Henry's section titled, "Four Ways of Knowing," he critiques the rationalist method. Henry's criticism of the rationalist method is not to say that he did not validate a *type* of rational intuition. Doyle explains,

Still, there is a kind of 'rational intuitionism' held by Augustine, Calvin, and others, including Henry, which believes that 'human beings know certain propositions immediately to be true, without resort to inference.' These would include the existence of God and the sense of right and wrong, the awareness of self, the laws of logic, and truths of mathematics. According to this view, the categories of thought are

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[65] Ibid., 109–110, Italics in original.

aptitudes for thought implanted by the Creator and synchronized with the whole of created reality.[66]

Doyle is correct when he insists that Henry's method is not derived from modern rationalism; instead, Revelational Theism finds its origin in Augustine's theory of knowledge. Doyle stresses that Henry's method is not a rationalistic approach because human reasoning is not the only reliable and valid source of knowledge. Revelation is the only reliable and valid source of knowledge, and human reason is fashioned to recognize God's revelation.[67]

Chapter two of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* discusses *how* Henry argues for a Revelational Theistic

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[66] Ibid., 111.

[67] Henry's revelational theistic epistemology insists that the Logos of God is both the creator and sustainer of reality. The Logos is both the salvific and epistemological mediator, who reveals Himself in creation and in Scripture. Doyle claims that Henry utilizes a deductive method; however, the purpose is to demonstrate that humanity is able to make legitimate inferences. The starting point of theology is the Bible, not human reason. Our knowledge of God does not arise from human speculation, but from divinely revealed truths. Finally, Doyle notes that Henry recognizes the necessity of the Holy Spirit to illumine the mind of believers, enabling them to understand and believe what they have learned.[67] In these respects, Doyle is correct in his assessment that Henry is not a rationalist. Instead, Henry, like Augustine and Calvin, utilizes reason in accordance with revelation.

epistemology (e.g., Augustinian) by incorporating its views

of reason and revelation. Furthermore, it notes where Henry

argues against rationalism; however, a few points need to

be made to distinguish Henry's epistemology from

rationalism. First, Henry makes a distinction between the

use of reason and rationalism. According to Henry, reason

simply refers to ". . . man's intellect, mind or cognitive

powers."[68] Furthermore, when discussing the relationship

between reason and revelation, he claims,

> Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the
> truth of Christianity included; reason is the
> instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its
> verifying principle; logical consistency is a
> negative test for truth and coherence a
> subordinate test. The task of Christian
> theology is to exhibit the content of biblical
> revelation as an orderly whole.[69]

In this quote, Henry makes the distinction between, "Divine

revelation is the source of **all** truth" and "reason is the

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[68] Ibid., 1:225–226.
[69] Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 1:215.

instrument for **recognizing** it [truth]." This distinction between the source of truth and the instrument for recognizing truth distinguishes Henry from rationalism.[70] Furthermore, Henry notes that this distinction between revelation and his use of reason distinguishes Revelational Theism from rationalism. He claims, "The rationalistic approach subordinates the truth of revelation to its own alternatives and has speculated itself into exhaustion. If we are again to speak confidently of metaphysical realities, the critically decisive issue is on what basis—human postulation or divine revelation?"[71] In brief, Henry favors Revelational Theism (e.g., Augustinianism) over and above rationalism.

The following quote by Henry illustrates *why* he favors a revelational approach. Henry claims, "The revelational alternative can lift the philosophical enterprise

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 1:95.

once again above theories that are essentially irrational, and can restore reason to indispensable importance, without abetting rationalism; it can overcome the current addition to the nonobjectivity of knowledge. . ."[72] Considering these types of comments from Henry, it is evident he favors a revelational approach to epistemology because it grounds knowledge in God (e.g., ontological axiom) and Scripture (e.g., epistemological axiom), over and against speculative philosophical approaches grounded in the non-God (e.g., their ontological axiom) and the postulations of human reason (e.g., their epistemological axiom).

A second distinction between Henry's method and rationalism is found in volume one, chapter four of *God, Revelation and Authority* titled, "The Ways of Knowing."[73] There he correlates rationalism with Descartes and criticizes the rationalist (e.g., Cartesian) method. However,

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[72] Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:95.
[73] Ibid., 1:70–95.

in chapter nineteen Henry includes a chapter titled "The

Philosophical Transcendent A Priori (II)." In that chapter,

Henry offers some of his most explicit criticisms of

rationalism, especially Cartesian rationalism, which are: (1)

Rationalism offers a wholly philosophical approach to

epistemology (whereas Henry believed in a revelational

approach to epistemology);[74] (2) Rationalism falsely makes

human reason the starting point for epistemic investigation

(whereas Henry made God, his ontological axiom, and the

Bible, his epistemological axiom, the starting points for

epistemic investigation);[75] (3) Henry distinguishes

Descartes view from Augustine's. Henry claims,

> Augustine had not only recognized God as
> the source of all being and true knowledge,
> but viewed all knowledge also as in some
> sense the revelation of the one ultimate Spirit
> to created spirits. Descartes's philosophy
> develops quite out of touch with this
> revelational setting. As speculative, his near-
> pantheistic schema is, of course, projected as

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[74] Ibid., 1:302.
[75] Ibid.

an alternative to the revelational theism which Christianity grounds in principle of supernatural disclosure. In Descartes's approach, with its emphasis on human initiative, one finds little to suggest any direct interest in divine revelation, whether particular or universal.[76]

In summary, the research indicates that Henry distinguishes his Revelational Theistic epistemology from rationalism; however, contrary to the claims of his critics, Henry's distinction is not a distinction without a difference.

The differences between Henry's epistemology and rationalism boil down to differences on the following points: (a) the definition of reason and the relationship between reason and revelation; (b) the primacy of revelation in the epistemological process; (c) the priority of the divine vs. the human initiative in the knowing process. The final reason Henry should not be considered a rationalist is because according to his own self-testimony he claims to follow a form of Revelational Theism in the

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[76] Ibid., 1:303.

Augustinian tradition, not a version of Cartesian

rationalism.

Foundationalism

The second charge against Henry's epistemology claims his

method endorses a version of strong foundationalism.[77] In

particular, this section is going to use Chad Brand's article

titled, *Is Carl Henry a Modernist?*, in order to analyze and

respond to the claim that Henry is a strong

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[77] Robert Audi claims, "A strong foundationalist theory of justification might hold that indirectly justified beliefs derive *all* their justification from foundational beliefs; a moderate theory might maintain only that the former would not be justified apart from the latter, and the theory might grant that other factors, such as coherence of belief with others one holds that are *not* in the chain, can add to its justification." Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd ed (New York: Routledge, 2011), 216.

foundationalist.[78] The analysis of Brand's article will
address: (1) Brand's distinction between strong (e.g.,
classic) foundationalism and soft (e.g., fallibilist)
foundationalism; and (2) Brand's claim that Henry affirms
a form of soft (e.g., fallibilist) foundationalism to overcome
the charge that Henry is a strong (e.g., classic)
foundationalist.[79]

Brand addresses the question, "Is Henry a
foundationalist?" by claiming, "If one means by
'foundationalist,' the search for Cartesian certainty through
the discovery of indubitable and noninferential truth
claims arrived at through reason or reflection, then the
answer is a resounding, 'no.'"[80] Brand goes on to claim,

> It might be correct, on the other hand, to call
> Henry a scriptural foundationalist, a term
> used by Nancey Murphy in her discussion of
> Donald Bloesch. Henry is clearly a biblical

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[78] Chad Owen Brand, "Is Carl Henry a Modernist?
Rationalism and Post-War Evangelical Theology," SBJT 8/4, winter
(2004), 44–60.
   [79] Ibid., 52–53.
   [80] Ibid., 52.

foundationlist in that his entire edifice is
founded upon a rock-ribbed conviction that
the Bible is to be trusted, while all
philosophical systems are suspect, even
Platonism, Aristotelianism and, certainly,
Cartesianism.[81]

Brand admits he pushes the description of Henry's

foundationalism a bit further to include the notion of

"biblical foundationalism."[82] The reason he labels Henry a

"biblical foundationalist," is because Brand believes Henry

must affirm a form of foundationalism in order to preserve

his commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture and adherence

to the law of non-contradiction.[83] Still, even by labeling

Henry a "biblical foundationalist," Brand believes this label

distinguishes Henry from the charges he is a "strong

foundationalist."

    In order to maintain the claim that Henry is not a

strong foundationalist, Brand appeals to Robert Audi and

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[81] Ibid., 52–53.
[82] Ibid., 53.
[83] Ibid.

makes the following point. He writes, "Robert Audi has recently argued that foundationalism is not the great Satan of contemporary thought, but rather, that a certain form of foundationalism is virtually required of anyone who does not wish to fall into pure subjectivism and relativism."[84] Brand goes on to say, "A commitment to foundationalism, then does not necessarily imply a commitment to indubitable and noninferential truths. There is, for instance, such a thing as fallibilist foundationalism."[85] At this point, Brand seems to claim there are at least three types of foundationalism: (1) strong foundationalism; (2) fallibilist foundationalism; and (3) biblical foundationalism. Apparently Brand believes by making these kinds of distinctions between these three views, he can overcome the charge that Henry is a strong foundationalist.

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

Brand believes these types of distinctions are able to free Henry's epistemology from the charges that it is a version of strong foundationalism because: (a) there are different types of foundationalism; and (b) it is a rhetorical device to label Henry as a foundationalist (insisting that he is a strong foundationalist) because of the negative overtones associated with strong foundationalism.[86] With these two points in mind, Brand suggests that contemporary scholars should not oppose of all types of foundationalism; instead, they should only oppose Cartesian foundationalism because of its criterion for indubitable and noninferrential truths. He also believes soft foundationalism (or as he labels it "fallibilist foundationalism") is able to overcome the charges to strong (e.g., Cartesian) foundationalism. With these distinctions in place, Brand claims,

> While Henry certainly believes the truths of Scripture are indubitable, he recognizes that human knowledge is always subject to error

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[86] Ibid.

> and revision. In regards to Scripture, Henry is certainly a firm, biblical foundationalist; in regards to the outworking of the theological implications of biblical asseverations, it appears that Henry is a soft foundationalist, one who is willing to admit that all our claims to understand are subject to the eternal bar of God's judgment.[87]

With Brand's categories clearly laid out on the table, a few comments in response to his points are necessary in order to continue the dialogues about Henry's epistemology.

First, Brand correctly notes that Henry opposes rationalism, especially Cartesian rationalism. In that sense, Brand and Doyle seem to be in agreement over their assessment of Henry's approach to rationalism. However, one of the difficulties with Brand's assessment is that he discusses Henry's epistemology in categories Henry never explicitly used. One would be hard pressed to find in any of Henry's literature a discussion on the distinctions between different types of foundationalism (e.g., strong, soft,

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[87] Ibid.

fallibilist, biblical and so forth). The present researcher believes one reason is because classic evangelicalism seems to discuss theories of knowledge in different categories than contemporary forms of evangelicalism. For that reason, there are times when classic evangelicals and present-day evangelicals are sometimes two ships passing in the night. For example, classical evangelicals seem to use the terms relativism and subjectivism interchangeably; whereas some present-day evangelical approaches make a distinction between them. In addition, many present-day evangelicals seem to have different categories for discussing epistemology (e.g., strong foundationalism, soft foundationalism, and so forth), than classic evangelicals.[88]

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[88] This comment on the different categories for discussing epistemology and the language used in that conversation could be a book in and of itself. The justification comes from personal experience and observation. In my experience, in my experience many classic evangelicals (e.g., Norman L. Geisler, Carl F. H. Henry, R. C. Sproul, J. I. Packer) use a historical approach to epistemology. For example, they study Augustinianism, Thomism, Hume, and Kantianism as such; however, they do not discuss these figures in terms of foundationalism, warrant, justification and so forth. Whereas many present-day

Nonetheless, just because Henry does not utilize the same language and categories of thought does not mean Brand and subsequent philosophers cannot place Henry into these epistemic categories.[89] In fact, the distinction Brand makes between strong (e.g., Cartesian) and soft (e.g., fallibilist) foundationalism rightly captures one aspect of Henry's epistemology *per se* and hermeneutic as epistemology. This is because Henry claims human knowledge is subject to error and revision; however, unlike subjectivist approaches to knowledge, he does not believe subjectivity undermines the objective nature of divine revelation or the universal laws of logic.[90] That being said, Brand's distinction between strong and soft foundationalist

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evangelicals will read those same figures, but use different categories and language in their conversations.

[89] In fact, in many respects academic disciplines attempt to explain previous theories through the lenses of present day approaches, categories, and methods.

[90] This claim will be further discussed in chapter six of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* on Henry's analysis of critical realism. In particular, it will discuss Henry's analysis of Bernard Lonergan and Alister McGrath's use of critical realism and theological method.

is a category used by contemporary epistemologists and it seems to rightly vindicate Henry from the charge of being a strong foundationalist. In that respect, Henry's epistemology is markedly different than strong foundationalist epistemologies because his epistemology, like that of soft foundationalism, includes criteria to account for error and revision (unlike strong foundationalism).

The second distinction Brand makes is one between strong foundationalism and biblical foundationalism.[91] While Brand does not offer an explicit definition of the term "biblical foundationalism," he does suggest it entails that the Bible is to be trusted over and above all philosophical systems. Brand's labeling of Henry as a "biblical foundationalist," while not a term used by Henry about his own method, seems to grasp one of the key points of Henry's epistemology; namely, his belief that the Bible

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[91] Ibid.

is the epistemological axiom for all knowledge. This entails: (a) epistemologists should not allow nonbiblical (e.g., alien categories) categories to frame the conversations and categories of epistemological dialogues and conclusions; (b) epistemologists should use the Bible to frame the conversations and categories of epistemological dialogue and conclusions; (c) all theological doctrine should find their origin in Scripture, not in the non-God (e.g., ontological axioms contrary to Christian theism) or in speculative human reason (e.g., non-biblical theories of knowledge or secular epistemological axioms).[92]

In the final analysis, the present researcher believes Brand's distinction between strong foundationalism and soft foundationalism (e.g., fallibilist foundationalism), seems to be a good way to distinguish Henry's epistemology from the charge that he is a strong foundationalist. In Brand's opinion, the key distinction is

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[92] See chapter two of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology*.

that strong foundationalism requires indubitability and

certainty, whereas Henry's epistemology allows for

fallibility and error. The second thing to notice is Brand's

analysis rightly captures the fact that Henry is a type of

foundationalist, namely a soft foundationalist and biblical

foundationalist. Henry believes there are certain unproven

truths that ground other truths claims, and that valid

inferences from those foundational truth claims provide

certain conclusions; however, those truths find their origin

in Scripture, not speculative human reason. In these

respects and with Brand's categories in place, Brand's

distinctions seem to provide a way to overcome the charges

made by Grenz, Franke, and McGrath that Henry is

foundationalist (e.g., strong foundationalist).

Cognitive-Propositionalism

After considering the works of Vanhoozer, three

characteristics can be identified to summarize his criticisms

of Henry's view of language. First, Vanhoozer suggests that Henry's method resembles Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning. He believes the failure of referential approaches to meaning is that language does more than refer. Second, Vanhoozer claims Henry's approach downplays or diminishes the various genres of Scripture. Third, Vanhoozer believes Henry's epistemology and religious language cannot account for the different *types* of truth. Each of these criticisms have been addressed in chapters two and three of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology*. However, a few comments will suffice to indicate *why* Vanhoozer's charges are actually misrepresentations of Henry's hermeneutic as epistemology and methodology.

Vanhoozer's first criticism is that Henry's philosophy of language resembles referential theories of meaning. However, Vanhoozer appears to misunderstand the nature of truth as correspondence to reality. He seems to have been misled by Wittgenstein's criticism that

correspondence is the "picture" theory wherein a statement

corresponds to the facts if it mirrors them. But this is not

what "correspondence" means. Correspondence means a

statement (or expression) must *match* reality, not

necessarily *mirror* it. It must correctly *reflect* reality, but

not necessarily *resemble* it. It must properly *represent*

reality, not *reproduce* it. A statement corresponds to reality

when it correctly signifies, conforms to, or agrees with

reality, not when it is a mirror image of it.[93]

Vanhoozer's second criticism is that Henry's

cognitive-propositional method downplays or diminishes

the various genres of Scripture is inaccurate. Thornbury

claims, "As is the case with other figures in the critical

reception of Henry, Vanhoozer reads Henry in the worst

possible light, namely, that Henry claims no more than one

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[93] See Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 139.

way to read a text of Scripture."[94] Paul Helm also

recognizes that Vanhoozer has characterized and

misrepresented the H-H hypothesis on genre and

propositional truth.[95] Henry's emphasis on propositional

revelation should not be seen as downgrading or diluting

the various genres of Scripture. In chapter three of the

Hermeneutics as Epistemology, Henry is quoted saying,

> By its emphasis that divine revelation is
> propositional, Christian theology in no way
> denies that the Bible conveys its message in
> many literary forms such as letters, poetry
> and parable, prophecy and history. What it
> stresses, rather, is that the truth conveyed by
> God through these various forms has
> conceptual adequacy, and that in all cases the
> literary teaching is part of a divinely inspired
> message that conveys the truth of divine
> revelation. Propositional disclosure is not
> limited to nor does it require only one
> particular literary genre. And of course the
> expression of truth in other forms than the

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[94] Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism*, 103.
[95] See Paul Helm, "Vanhoozer's Remythologizing Theology,"
Helm's Deep, entry posted May 1, 2010,
http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/search?.q=Remythologizing+Theology.

> customary prose does not preclude expressing that truth in declarative propositions.[96]

A straight forward reading of Henry's *God, Revelation, and Authority* reveals he affirms the Bible's various uses of genre. One of the key points of difference between Henry and Vanhoozer centers on the nature and purpose of genre. Vanhoozer believes that propositional theology downplays the Bible's various genres. Whereas, Henry believes propositional theology affirms the Bible's various genres. Vanhoozer appears to suggest that genre determines meaning. In this sense, genre criticism operates as the best way to understand the *way* the various writers of Scripture are communicating the different *types* of truth. Henry, on the other hand, claims genre does not determine meaning; instead, it enhances meaning and magnifies truth.

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[96] Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:463.

Vanhoozer's third charge is Henry's view of epistemology and religious language cannot account for the different *types* of truth. Chapter two of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* demonstrates that for Henry, because all of humanity equally bears the image of God, each individual has the same rational faculties. The continuity of rationale in humanity entails there are not different *types* of truth. There is only *one* truth and logic in all of humanity. Chapter three of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* establishes how Henry taught that the plurality of genres in Scripture are each capable of grasping and communicating this *one* truth in a *variety* of literary forms.[97] Just like different cultures throughout the world do not create different minds,

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[97] This aspect of Henry's language theory was explained in chapter three of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* under the sections titled, "The Logic of Religious Language," "Linguistic Analysis and Propositional Truth," and "The Bible as Propositional Revelation."

so too, the different genres of Scripture do not create

different kinds of rationale and truth.[98]

As chapter two of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology*

argues, Henry affirms a correspondence view of truth (e.g.,

where correspondence takes ontological priority over a

coherence test for truth; however, coherence is a subtest for

truth).[99] All views of truth have an inherent correspondence

to reality, because the proponents believe their view

corresponds to reality.[100] Most basic of all is the fact that

the correspondence view of truth is literally undeniable for

the very denial of it purports to correspond to reality.

Without a correspondence view of truth, there is no basis

for knowing an error (e.g., there is nothing in reality to

which the claim must be made to correspond). Almost

anything could be true if one starts redefining the nature of

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[98] See the section in chapter of three in *Hermeneutics as Epistemology* titled, "The Bible as Propositional Revelation." Also, the section in chapter four titled, "The Grammatical-Historical Method of Interpretation."

[99] See chapter two of *Hermeneutics as Epistemology*.

[100] Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 139.

truth claiming there are different *types* of truth (e.g.,

personal vs. correspondence). It is a misnomer to speak of

"relational" or "personal" truth. There are truths about

relationships and truths about persons in Scripture, but truth

itself is not relational or personal. Truth is propositional,

that is, it makes a statement that affirms or denies

something about reality. Norman Geisler and I our book

Defending Inerrancy claim,

> . . . Vanhoozer's own description [of epistemology and propositional revelation] admits, he is diminishing much of the history of Christianity from the first century to our time. Even he acknowledges that 'for large swaths of the Western tradition, the task of theology consisted in mining propositional nuggets from the biblical deposit of truth' (LI? 94). He admits that the roots of this go back to the New Testament where 'the Pauline shaft in particular was thought to contain several rich doctrinal lodes' (94). He also correctly observes that this carried into the Middle Ages. He wrote: 'According to Thomas Aquinas, Scripture contains the science of God: the unified teaching from God about God. . . . doctrine is essentially sacred teaching, a divinely revealed

informative proposition about an objective reality' (94). Following this, in '19th-century Princeton, A. A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield laid the groundwork for conservative evangelical theology by insisting on the importance of propositional truth' (94). In short, Vanhoozer's view is against the mainstream of Christianity for the last two thousand years![101]

Henry defends the traditional view of truth through his revelational hermeneutic. The Bible calls for Christians to use reason (Isa. 1:18: 1 Pet. 3:15). Indeed, the use of the mind is part of the great commandment, which includes loving God with both the "mind" as well as the "heart" (Matt. 22:37). Surely Vanhoozer does not want to remove the laws of logic from the task of thinking. The apostle Paul admonishes for Christians to "avoid . . . contradictions" (1 Tim. 6:20). Even the Westminster Confession of Faith (which is a classic

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[101] Ibid., 141.

confession in Vanhoozer's Reformed tradition) encourages the use of logic in theology and speaks of "the whole counsel of God . . . either expressly set down in Scripture, *or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture*."[102] Using logic to deduce truths from Scripture (which is the basis of these truths) is not basing truths on logic. Logic is only the rational instrument (coming from a rational God and inherent in the rational creatures made in His image) that enables humanity to discover certain truths that are implied in Scripture.

Conclusion

The research from this article indicates that the claim "Henry is a rationalist" is misguided because he neither

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[102] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes* (3 vols.: Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 3:603, Emphasis added.

meets the standard definition of a rationalist nor does he employ a rationalist method. Instead, Henry affirms an Augustinian epistemology and presuppositional methodology. Furthermore, the charges by Kevin Vanhoozer are a misrepresentation of Henry's actual position. He does not meet the criterion for affirming early Wittgenstein's theory of referential meaning. Moreover, instead of diminishing the Bible's various genres, Henry affirms that each one of them is important and essential for a proper exegesis of Scripture. And lastly, Henry believes there is a single type of truth given by God which is displayed in both general and special revelation.

Book Review: *Patterns of Evidence: The Exodus*

Christopher T. Haun[1]

Introduction

"It goes without saying that none of the gruesome, disordered events described in Exodus ever took place. Israeli archaeologists are among the most professional in the world. . . . There was no flight from Egypt, no wandering in the desert (let alone for the incredible four-decade length of time mentioned in the Pentateuch), and no dramatic conquest of the Promised Land. It was all, quite simply and very ineptly, made up at a much later date." This attack by Christopher Hitchens[2] on monotheism was a regurgitation of what most experts in the fields of Egyptology, Syro-Palestinian archaeology, and even

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[2] Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2007),102. Cited in the *Patterns of Evidence: the Exodus* book.

biblical archaeology seem to be saying. The stories in
Exodus are especially subject to the prevailing climate of
skepticism. The tribes of Israel weren't in Egypt at all in
the thirteenth century BC. They neither flourished there nor
were they enslaved there. They did not make a mass exodus
after a series of catastrophes crippled Egyptian civilization.
They did not wander as a group of thousands (much less
millions) in the Sinai wilderness for forty years before
crossing the Jordan into Canaan. They did not conquer the
walled cities of the Canaanites. The Israelites probably did
not even exist as an identifiable people at all back then.
They only evolved through chaotic and gradual forces into
a distinct people in the seventh century BC. The Torah was
probably written in the seventh century BC as well. And it
is not for no objective reason that they're able to say these
things. The evidence uncovered so far in Egypt and Canaan
from the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BC simply forms a

model that looks entirely different than the model offered by the Bible.

This climate of skepticism challenged filmmaker Timothy Mahoney to question his faith and search for answers. Twelve years after this journey began, he published the book *Patterns of Evidence: The Exodus* to share the highlights of his quest. A "visual story teller" by trade, he and the Thinking Man Films team also created an excellent-quality documentary film to compliment the book.[3] This is a review of the book and, to a lesser degree, the film. This review consists of eleven chapter summaries, my positive feedback, answers to three objections to POE, thoughts about the strategic importance of the Exodus story and projects like POE, and a final conclusion.

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[3] The book and film are available through http://PatternsOfEvidence.com. The film made its one-night-only debut in 700 theaters in the USA on January 19th, 2015, and earned a single encore showing soon after.

Chapter Summaries

The foreword to the book is written by physicist Gerald Schroeder. He describes Patterns of Evidence: the Exodus (POE hereafter) as "a game-changer" and praises Mahoney's willingness to reevaluate the data. Mahoney is no mere armchair sleuth. He made several journeys to see the relevant source data with his own eyes and to hear as many viewpoints as possible. This approach led to a project with a wealth of fifty fascinating interviews. Highlights of seventeen of those interviews made it into the film. Some of the interviews are surprisingly candid. Something about Mahoney's respectfulness, passion, and openness makes people open up to him. Although this film leads to an optimistic view about the historical veracity of the Exodus, it cannot be dismissed simply as Judeo-Christian propaganda. Of the ten agnostics/atheists surveyed after previewing the film, nine gave the film a "very good" to "excellent" rating.

In chapter one, Mahoney's first investigative interviews seemed to be slightly more encouraging than discouraging. He met with Kenneth Kitchen, a well-known Egyptologist who helped set the standards for dating Egypt's past. While favorable towards the Exodus being historical, Kitchen did not have any hard evidence to offer for consideration. This is not a problem for him because the Egyptians never recorded their defeats, only two percent of all Egyptian records written on papyrus survived, and the frequent flooding of the Nile could have washed away much of what may have been in Goshen. The second interview was with Hershel Shanks, founder of the Biblical Archaeological Review. Looking at Exodus from the standpoint of genre and authorial intent, Shanks judged Exodus to ultimately be theological, non-historical, and legendary—but not mythical. Dismissing Exodus as pure myth is going too far; Exodus does contain some real history and miracle. But providing the reader with history

wasn't the author's intention. While he agreed that,
"absence of evidence is not evidence of absence," and
while he could also admit that there is no archaeological
evidence that conflicts with the Exodus account, he doubts
archaeology's ability to decide upon the degree of factual
correspondence that the book of Exodus has. His third
interview was with Jim Phillips who believes the exodus
event to be historical but denied the miraculous aspect.
Despite thinking Mahoney's mission impossible, he
expressed openness to consider whatever Mahoney might
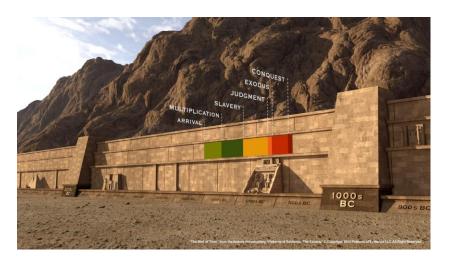find.

Chapter two contains fascinating interviews with
three Israeli Archaeologists and three Israeli political
leaders. Norma Franklin, Israel Finkelstein, and Ze'ev
Herzog all seem sincere in saying that they just don't see
any evidence for the Exodus. Herzog states it the most
strongly: "the more information we have on biblical
matters, the more contradictions we've found. And the

evidence we do have is very rich." But Herzog's admission

that such judgments are based on data only to the tune of

ten percent and upon interpretation for the other ninety

percent proved encouraging. Interviews with Natan

Sharansky, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Shimon Peres add a

different dimension and gravitas to the quest. They discuss

how the exodus and the giving of the Law has ethical and

socio-political reverberations not just for Israel but for all

modern democracies and human rights movements. A

viewing of the Dead Sea Scrolls encouraged Mahoney even

further by pointing out that a shepherd boy discovered the

most significant archaeological find of the twentieth

century. What might Mahoney find?

In chapter three Mahoney and his team visit Egypt.

An interview with Mansour Boraik suggested that even

though there doesn't seem to be any evidence found so far,

it was still true that the ancient Egyptians never chiseled or

painted bad news in their temple reliefs, and there are still

many secrets left to be discovered in the sand. Then the

"wall of time" is discussed. In the film the wall of time

proves to be a very effective visual aid for conceptualizing

the complexities of multiple "patterns of evidence" that are

otherwise difficult to juggle mentally. The computer

generated imagery definitely helped prevent information

overload from occurring. This is one of those things that

needs to be seen in the film to be properly appreciated.

The theory that the exodus probably should have

happened—if it happened at all—during the reign of

Ramesses II is probed with the help of Kenneth Kitchen

and James Hoffmeier. Much of the assumption that

Ramesses II is the best choice stems from the fact that

Exodus 1:11 mentions the city of Rameses. But still there

really doesn't seem to be any palpable evidence to point to

anything from Exodus in thirteenth century BC Egypt. The

problem of the lack of evidence for a large group of

Semites living in the city of Ramesses is raised and

challenged. New findings by Manfried Bietak's team

thicken the plot. Mahoney visits Bietak to explore the

question of whether he unearthed evidence of Syrians or

Semites living in Avaris. Just as Mahoney's hopes are

raised, Bietak disappoints him by judging that these

findings shouldn't be connected with "proto-Israelites."

Why? The findings date to a time older than the twelfth

century BC.

In chapter four the team returns to Egypt to try to

figure out who the Pharaoh was at the time of the Exodus.

Kent Weeks, the archaeologist who discovered the tomb of

the sons of Ramesses II, explains why Ramesses II was one of the greatest pharaohs and weighs the pros and cons for his being the pharaoh at the time of the Exodus. He points out that there are ambiguities and very significant problems in the conventional dating system. Without offering any positive evidence to consider (he also agrees that the Egyptians did not record inglorious events), he encouraged Mahoney to dare to question the assumptions about the timing of the exodus. In the attempt to develop a scientific approach to reexamining the data, the decision is made to focus more on the identification of a complex, non-random pattern of evidence. Predicated upon the outline of the Exodus events listed in Genesis 15:13-16, the pattern of **A**rrival, **M**ultiplication, **S**lavery, **J**udgment, **D**eliverance, and **C**onquest (A-M-S-J-E-C) becomes the pattern of evidence that they will search the data for. They are not just looking for evidence; the evidence is not going to be considered evidence unless it matches that pattern and fits

in the right sequence. This approach is revolutionary

because it temporarily bypasses the problems that have

arisen from the method of deciding upon dates first (using

arguably imperfect dating systems) and then looking for

evidence only inside the data within parameters of specific

date ranges.

Chapter five examines data and arguments for

possible evidences for the arrival of the descendants of

Jacob in Egypt. The possibility that Bietak discovered

evidence of Semites is reconsidered. Egyptologist David

Rohl's theories based on unorthodox dating are considered.

The problem of seeing no evidence of Semites in the city of

Rameses may be solved by the finding of "Asiatics" (non-

Egyptians from the Levant) in Avaris, which is beneath the

city of Rameses. The use of Rameses in Exodus 1:11 is

questioned as a marker for dating because it is also

mentioned in Genesis 47:11. What if Rameses is just a

place name and not a time marker? What if it is an

anachronism added later to the text? A case is made for

placing the Jews in Goshen (in cities such as Avaris) during

Egypt's thirteenth Dynasty (and the Middle Kingdom)

rather than in the 19th Dynasty (and the Latter Kingdom).

Perhaps the evidence is missing because the dating system

causes scholars to look in the wrong strata and time periods

for it. A tantalizing case is made for unearthed evidence of

Joseph and his brothers at Avaris. Charles Ailing is

interviewed as a check on Rohl's theory. Hoffmeier

provides additional arguments in favor of the story of

Joseph. Rohl explains the significance of the canal of

Joseph while Bryant Wood explains the significance of the

evidence of the transfer of wealth from the districts to the

Pharaoh.

Chapter six considers the evidences for the

multiplication of the Jews in Goshen and subsequent

slavery. Rohl describes the humble beginnings of the city

of Avaris. It starts with less than 100 people who seem to

be Semites and within four generations it swells to 30,000 Asiatics (non-Egyptians from Canaan or Syria). Hoffmeier elaborates on the evidences for the Semitic culture of these settlers. John Bimson mentions twenty or more settlements like Avaris in Goshen that have not been fully excavated yet. Hoffmeier discusses evidence of slavery at the tomb of Rekhmire (and the problem of applying it to the Exodus period). Rohl discusses the evidence from the Avaris excavation of dramatic changes in lifespans (that are consonant with slavery) and other nuances seen in data from the graves. The "Brooklyn Papyrus" (From the thirteenth dynasty) is considered as a list of slaves with Hebraic names. Since this evidence shows up ~400 years earlier than expected, it tends to not interpreted as evidence.

In chapter seven the evidence for the judgment of Egypt (the ten plagues and the drowning in the Red Sea) is considered. Rohl reasons, "Look for collapse in Egyptian

civilization and that's where you'll find Moses and the Exodus." But some seem satisfied to say, "Egyptians did not record their defeats," to explain away the lack of evidence of judgments in the time of the 19th Dynasty. The fact remains that Egyptian civilization did not apparently suffer any mortal blows during the New Kingdom era. So evidences of such a destruction in the Middle Kingdom are considered. The pros and cons of the Ipuwer Papyrus (or the *Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage*) as evidence are weighed. (The film includes a helpful reading of parallel passages from the Exodus and from Ipuwer in tandem. The audience in the theater I was in seemed particularly impressed at the unmistakable harmony between the two.) Maarten Raven is consulted as the expert on the Admonitions. He is adamant about seeing no connection between Ipuwer's Admonitions and the Exodus. To begin with, both accounts are way too fantastic to be true. Second, Ipuwer's account is way too early to align with the

Exodus story. Third, scholar Miriam Lichteim ruled out the calamity described by Ipuwer as being historical because the account was of a poetic genre and therefore not possibly history. Apparently a text cannot be both poetic and historical at the same time. Fourth, Lichteim cites an apparent incongruity about the wealthy becoming poor and the poor becoming wealthy that makes the Admonitions seem logically absurd to her. (Mahoney points out the answer to this conundrum may be found in the Exodus account.)

Chapter eight tackles the challenge of the Ramesses Exodus theory. Kent Weeks confirms that there was no collapse in the time of Ramesses II. Finkelstein agrees. There just is not any evidence of national weakness or collapse at this time. Returning to the Bible, the date from 1 Kings 6:1 is factored in. It says clearly says that the Exodus event occurred exactly 480 years before the building of Solomon's temple. This suggests a date of 200 years before

Ramesses date. Hoffmeier suggests the need to choose between the 1 Kings passage (and the date of the fifteenth century BC) and the Exodus 1:11 passage, which to him indicates a thirteenth century BC date. (Mahoney points out the Rameses-anachronism loophole to Hoffmeier's argument.) Other logical problems are considered. A new pharaoh came to power while Moses was in exile for forty years and that's difficult to reconcile with Ramesses II who ruled till age ninety-seven. The Merneptah stele mentions Israel as existing as a nation in the time of Ramesses II. Charles Ailing and Clyde Billington introduce the little-known Berlin Pedestal which seems to indicate that the nation of Israel existed by 1360 BC—which is 100 years earlier than Ramesses II. They also mention little known hieroglyphs dated 1390 BC that talk about a Bedouin people who worship *Yahweh*, the name of God that was revealed to both the Israelites and to Pharaoh by Moses just

prior to the exodus event. (Compare Ex. 3:13-15 with Ex. 6:3.)

Chapter nine digs for evidence of the departure from Egypt—the exodus proper. The findings from mass grave pits and abandonment in both Avaris and Kahun are evaluated. Manetho's history seems to say that God (singular) smote the Egyptians during the thirteenth dynasty. The only true collapse of civilization in a 1,000 year block of Egyptian history occurred in the thirteenth dynasty and was followed naturally by the Hyksos invasion.

Chapter ten considers the usual reasons for rejection of the conquest of Canaan and gives a special focus on the excavations at Jericho. Kenyon proved that there was no Jericho and other city-states in Canaan to be conquered in 1250 BC. Not only is there no evidence, there are no such cities at the expected time. But Bimson points out that there was a destruction of those cities at an earlier century. Rohl

chimes in with what seems like the method and spirit of the

POE search: "If people are telling us there is no Jericho at

the time Joshua conquered the Promised Land, and

therefore Joshua is a piece of fiction, and therefore the

Conquest is a piece of fiction, and then probably Exodus is

a piece of fiction as well, if that's the case, why don't we

ask the simple question, 'Well, when was Jericho around,

when was Jericho destroyed,' and start from that point of

view?" Wood dismantles Kenyon's claim that Jericho was

destroyed around 1550 BC *by the Egyptians*. Wood also

discusses pottery analysis from the destruction of Jericho.

Wood and Ailing make a case for the Exodus around 1450

BC while Rohl and Bimson suggest the dates are in need of

major correction. All agree that the destruction of Jericho

fits the pattern found in Exodus. The destruction of the city

of Hazor and evidence for its King Jabin is also considered.

The biblical story of the conquest and the scope of the

destruction is revisited. The Bible says nine cities were

destroyed. Joshua did not burn most of the cities of Canaan.
Bimson mentions thirty sites that were destroyed or
abandoned at the end of the Middle Bronze Age. The
evidence for Shechem as the location of Joseph's bones is
evaluated. The pattern of evidence seems to fit but the
problem is that it's all too early for most scholars to readily
accept.

Chapter 11 tackles the problem of dating and time.
Could conventional Egyptian history really be off by 300
years? Hoffmeier is against "chronological revisionism."
Finkelstein insists they cannot be off by more than ten
years. Alan Gardiner's old comment about Egyptian history
being built on the shaky foundation of "rags and tatters" is
considered. Weeks tends to agree but cannot see shifting it
all by centuries. Rohl and Bimson suggest maybe the "dark
periods" between the three kingdoms of Egypt may have
been miscalculated. The length of the Third Intermediate
Period is particularly questionable.

Chapter 12 digs deeper into the matter of the historical evolution of conventional Egyptian dating and timelines. The dating of Pharaoh Shishak/Shoshenq I to the time of 925 BC is a key. If that date is wrong, many other dates are likewise off. And are Shishak and Shoshenq really the same Pharaoh? If not, perhaps everything needs to be rethought.

The epilogue hints to a sequel. At least four helpful bonus chapters follow.

Positive Feedback

POE does a great job of introducing a large quantity of data that seems to fit the A-M-S-J-E-C pattern well. It is well suited for novices, experts, believers, and nonbelievers. Those who are new to the subject get a great introduction and a dose of optimism. Those who have thought the stories contain a few kernels of truth might begin to see more than just kernels. The scholars who believe the Bible

is reliable in its historical accounts may now have more impetus, opportunity, and courage to swim against the stream now. (For now their careers may be at risk if they suggest the Bible should be taken seriously as a historical reference tool.) The film's persuasiveness has already proven to win scholars over. An Israeli archaeologist who previewed the film (and who must remain unnamed for now) said it was remarkable in every way, is probably correct on the whole, and harmonizes very well with the findings of another famous Israeli archaeologist from the 1930s who was not mentioned in the film. An Israeli Egyptologist who was asked to preview the film responded with:

> I am so impressed with your work, the richness and the scholars that you have reached to. I have to say that I have been approached several times in the past with attempts [by others] to do your [type of] work but it was never the real thing. . . .While I was watching your movie it felt this is it! I had always the feeling that Avaris was a great key to understand our story but it was always very political and with many secrets . . . some of the findings did not reach the scholars especially the one[s] in Israel. Now I understand why. . . You definitely convinced me in

> your dating. . . It make sense. . . I think I can contribute you with more evidence from my research. I'm an Egyptologist specializing in the language. There are references in different text that you will be interested to know [about]. I would love to participate . . . to share what I know and why I support you strongly.

The film has much to commend it. The CGI for the wall of time is better seen than described. The CGI reconstructions of Avaris and what might be Joseph's tomb offer something that the book cannot. The readings and recitations of the Exodus by Rabbi Manis Friedman were a pleasant touch. Presumably the DVD sets will have special features that the book will not include. The discussion panel segment with Gretchen Carlson, Eric Metaxas, Anne Graham Lotz, Jonathan Morris, and Dennis Prager had several worthwhile moments. Prager expanded on a thought-provoking argument for believing the Exodus story that POE film only gave ten seconds to. Short cameos by Dr. Walter C. Kaiser Jr, Dr. Norman L. Geisler, and Dr. Joseph C. Holden helped highlight the apologetic value of the project.

POE still offers some fascinating glimpses of fideism and the neo-kantian fact/value dichotomy in action. The film starts with a conversation between Rabbi Wolpe and Michael Medved. Wolpe explained his view of the Exodus saying, "Whether it was true, it is true. And those are two different things." An interview with Israel Finkelstein (who influenced Wolpe) discusses the juxtaposition of his empirical faith in that which is tangible, factual, and logical with his not-so-rational-but-highly-valued type of faith in religious traditions and symbols. The interview with Maarten Raven captures a closed-minded presuppositionalism that also warrants being seen on film.

Anticipated Objections

Although Mahoney and team try to avoid getting hung up on the dating of data in favor of focusing on patterns of evidence, they are certainly going to refuel the fires of the date debate. Hoffmeier and Kitchen date the Exodus late in

the New Kingdom (around 1250 BC) while Wood and

Aling place it early in the New Kingdom. Bimson pins it to

the end of the Middle Bronze Age while Rohl places it

slightly earlier. Despite the fact that Mahoney is careful to

avoid setting any dates himself, it still seems like he's

encouraging serious reexamination of the conventional

dating systems. For better or for worse, many conservative

scholars are going to resist this. Additional measures of

caution about the dating problem may be presented in the

book that may not be as obvious in the film.

It may be possible that some may object to the

reliance on David Rohl. Rohl did seem to get more air time

in the film than most of the other scholars. He's also the

most likely to get slapped with labels like maverick,

sensationalist, unorthodox, or radical. RationalWiki.org

lumps Rohl in with the provocative and largely discredited

Velikovsky. Wood says Rohl "cannot so easily be brushed

aside" but offers several criticisms of his work.[4] Some

might be uncomfortable with the fact that Rohl is an

agnostic. (There is a piquant irony in the fact that an

agnostic seems to have more faith in the historical

reliability of the Old Testament than many Christians and

Jews!) I'm not trying to marginalize Rohl's perspective

here. All theories deserve testing and Einstein was right

when he said "we can't solve problems by using the same

kind of thinking we used when we created them." There

may be additional need for caution with some of Rohl's

theories. If someone who sees the film somehow concludes

that Mahoney is parroting Rohl, I think a reading of the

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[4] Bryant G. Wood. David Rohl's Revised Egyptian Chronology: A View from Palestine. *Associates for Biblical Research.* May 23rd, 2007. http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2007/05/David-Rohls-Revised-Egyptian-Chronology-A-View-From-Palestine.aspx. Accessed February 13, 2015. To be fair, some of Wood's work on Jericho is also criticized constructively as being "equivocal, unpublished evidence" by Holden and Geisler in *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible* (Harvest House: 2013) 235-237.

book would be a good to clear up that misconception. It is clearer in the book that Mahoney doesn't embrace Rohl in all ways at all times. And, given the bonus chapters factor in the book, ultimately it is the conservative Hoffmeier who gets the last word rather than the radical Rohl.

Another possible objection that might arise from some is Rohl's recommendation that the reference to the "city of Rameses" in Exodus 1:11 and the reference to "the land of Rameses" in Genesis 47:11 are anachronistic redactions. This proves to be a key debate when dating the Exodus. The idea that Moses may not have written every single word in the Pentateuch might be a problem for some. While firmly holding to the Mosaic authorship of Genesis and Exodus myself, there may be a good reason to believe there is a modicum of later redaction in the Torah after Moses' death. For example, although it is possible that Moses could have prophetically seen his own death and burial and written about it before dying, I can see why

many would find more likely the idea that another scribe recorded Moses' death and burial story in Deuteronomy 34. This is of course a very far cry from the radical redaction criticism of a previous century that produced the audacious JEPD theory. Also there may be some possibility of apologetic value in accepting the notion that the mentions of Rameses in Genesis and Exodus were not written by Moses. Many today (including some of the people interviewed in the POE project) believe that none of the five books of Moses were in fact written by Moses. They prefer to think that the Torah was written centuries later by other scribes. One common theory is that Ezra, one of the few literate Jews who could read Hebrew after the Babylonian captivity, may have been the main author of the Torah in the seventh century BC. But if Rohl is right in saying that the mentions of Rameses in the Torah are anachronisms, there is the possibility of a chronological marker here that would help disprove the Ezra theory.

There was only a ~200 year span where it was meaningful to speak about the city of Rameses or the land of Rameses. If a scribe after the time of Moses did add Rameses to the text, or change a name from Avaris to Rameses to make it more recognizable to his audience, for example, it would then be likely that the redaction occurred in the thirteenth century BC (assuming standard dating) rather than the seventh century BC. Even if Moses did not write Rameses, it would have been someone who lived much closer to his time than to Ezra's time.

The Strategic Importance of the Exodus Story

The strategic objective of the Christian apologetic endeavor is not just to "take every thought captive to Christ" but also to "destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:3-5 ESV). The war is largely ideological and so are the "strongholds" that need to be destroyed. The stronghold of skepticism about

the events of Exodus that has been fortified throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. POE is one of the few attempts to lay siege to it. The knowledge of God is at stake here. The God we serve has made himself known in human history not just with meaningful words but with meaningful actions. The veracity of Exodus matters because it arguably the best showcase of interventions by the God of Jacob into our world. A skeptical view of Exodus fits with atheism, agnosticism, deism, polytheism, or finite godism. What was the public uproar over Ridley Scott's 2014 epic film *Exodus: Gods and Kings*? It was over the casting of actors seeming racially biased. Meanwhile the few objections voiced to casting God as a vengeful, imperfect child and a finite alien-god went largely unheard. But why should this surprise anyone? As long as the historians are saying that YHWH did not actually do anything in Egypt for the Israelites at all, how can there be any scandal over taking his name in vain? There is no force in an objection to the

reinterpretation of a totally fictitious character with a

different fictitious character. A vindication of the historical

reliability of the Exodus account is also then a vindication

of theism—the belief in a personal God who purposes and

acts in ways that cannot be thwarted. Moses said this to a

new generation of Israelites:

> [H]as any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. (Deut. 4.)

The connection between the acts of God and the knowledge

of God (for both Jews and Egyptians) was a running theme

throughout the book of Exodus:

- Ex. 6: "**you shall know** that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."
- Ex.7: "Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians **shall know** that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them. . . By this **you shall know** that I am the LORD. . ."

- Ex. 8: "Be it as you say, so that **you may know** that there is no one like the LORD our God."
- Ex. 9: "so that **you may know** that there is none like me in all the earth. . . . so that **you may know** that the earth is the LORD's."
- Ex. 10: "that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that **you may know** that I am the LORD."
- Ex. 14: "and the Egyptians **shall know** that I am the LORD."
- Ex. 33: "how shall it **be known** that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

Joshua extended the need for this knowledge to everyone:

> For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever. (Joshua 4:23-24)

While none of the Christian creeds explicitly require belief in the exodus story. But when the factual nature of the exodus story is removed, very little in the factual core of the Christian faith makes any sense. The

idea that the God of Jacob is able and willing to act in our

world to keep his promises to mankind suffers a mortal

blow. If we cannot trust the biblical record of God

intervening powerfully in human history to redeem his

people from slavery in Egypt, what rationale is there for

bothering to pretend that the same God will redeem us from

anything? If the old covenants are legendary, how can the

new covenant be any less so? If Exodus is one big myth,

then the Passover celebration, the Last Supper, and the

Lord's Supper become celebrations of myths. If the Old

Testament is legendary, the New Testament, unable to rise

above its source, either becomes legends sitting atop older

legends or delusion based upon legends. If the first and

foundational books of the Hebrew Scriptures are

considered to be a mix of legend overlaying history, why

expect scholarly attitudes about the four gospel to be

significantly different? For when the beginning of a long

story begins with, "Once upon a time," the tone for the all

the chapters in the story is set. In 1 Cor. 10 some of the exodus events are said to serve as "examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things. . . and were written down as warnings for us." Is the reality of the basis for holiness predicated upon a non-real event? Hebrews 3:7-19 uses the parts of the exodus story to urge us to not have "a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." Hebrews 11:22-31 cites eight of the exodus events to explain what faith is. Faith itself would need to be redefined as believing that which we know does not correspond to reality. As confidence in the historicity of Exodus is allowed to continue to wither, we also let wither the idea that religious faith, factual correspondence, and reason can coexist.

Conclusion

In Numbers 13, most were too afraid to try to conquer the fortified cities of Canaan. Caleb alone said, "We should go

up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." Mahoney and his team remind me of Caleb. There aren't many people who are laying siege to these particular strongholds of skepticism. Perhaps the same fortified cities that Caleb was referring to are what Paul was imagining when he set the expectations that "the weapons of our warfare. . . have divine power to destroy strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Thinking Man Films has given us a powerful tool that makes people rethink the historical reliability of the Bible and end up with an optimism. Perhaps this could help inspire a new generation to take up the cause of trying to knowing God better and trying to make him better known in this world.

Mahoney and team are just getting started. They have a vision for spending the rest of their lives investigating the patterns of evidence for several of the historical records in the Bible that are shrouded in skepticism. The next project is slated to tackle the doubts

and controversies surrounding the route of the Exodus, the

location of the Red Sea crossing, the location of Mount

Sinai/Horeb, and the area of wilderness wanderings.