An apologetic in support of biblical inerrancy substantiating objective faith in a pluralist society

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ABSTRACT

Scripture's witness of its Divine authority holds enduring importance for many Christian believers. There is renewed contemporary interest in the topic of scriptural authority, inspiration, and inerrancy. There is also philosophical, theological and cultural opposition to such notions, given a globally prevalent pluralistic culture. This study considers the contemporary relevance of biblical inerrancy (unless otherwise stipulated, hereafter referred to interchangeably as either biblical inerrancy or inerrancy), acknowledging serious implications for biblical doctrine and its objective application to human life. Consulted materials demonstrate an interplay between the nature of God, and humanity towards understanding the nature of Scripture. Since this study concerns itself with nature, truth (specifically, objective truth) is a prominent theme of this study. The study affirms the likelihood of inerrancy, given historical, textual, and epistemological factors in reaching a conclusion; also, acknowledging nuances for study. Objective faith is paralleled with inerrancy, one allowing the other, such that substantiating inerrancy substantiates objective faith, with the proposed effect of resolution against ideological pluralism. The topic is proposed in line with the Reformed Tradition and evangelical orthodoxy, applying historical-grammatical methodology, and relevant subsidiary methodologies.

Key Words

Scripture, Inerrancy, Inspiration, Relativism, Pluralism, Postmodernism, Truth, Objectivity

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and problem statement

The primary endeavour of this study is an apologetic of orthodox biblical inerrancy, and assessing the application of inerrancy to contemporary context towards an objective faith. As such, the focus is principally on what substantiates the credibility of biblical inerrancy and what constitutes inerrancy, and related terms such as infallibility, inspiration and authority, applied to the Bible (or Scripture) in juxtaposition with cultural ideologies. The latter terms in description of Scripture find their grounding in Scripture's witness of itself (2 Tim 3:16; cf. Ps 119:160). The orthodox view that "the Bible is divinely inspired in its very words, including matters of history and science" (Geisler, 2004:7), is of primary interest to this study. This sentiment is further defined in article seven of the historically significant Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI, 1978:4). The notion of inerrancy is grounded in divine inspiration, with the all-encompassing extent of this inspiration clearly expressed in article nine of the Statement (ICBI, 1978:4): "We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write". Here the understanding of inspiration is that which assures the absolute truth of what is written, necessitating a text totally without error. In light of this, the description "unlimited inerrancy" (Geisler & Roach, 2011:12) best describes the orthodox view. With the endeavour to affirm orthodox biblical inerrancy in the contemporary setting, four categories are perceived as primary: the nature of God and humankind; the nature of Scripture; the nature of contemporary context; and truth (objectivity), which underpins each element.

A celebrated and widely influential work of the nineteenth century, *Inspiration*, by Warfield and Hodge (1881), has found contemporary relevance in a new edition (2015). The effective brevity of the work informs this study of the outline of longstanding arguments; it is a primary source for this study. Engagement with works by contemporary authorities on the topic of inerrancy, such as Geisler and Roach (2011) and Carson in his acclaimed co-edited work with Woodbridge (1992), and his notable individual work (2010), are instrumental to a study centred on contemporary context. The Carson and Woodbridge compilation work delivers an authoritative unison orthodox verdict that "the Bible is the Word of God written" (1992:9). Carson's latter individual work incorporates some of the former's material highlighting the importance of early discussions on the nature of Scripture, explaining that "not a few treatments of the nature of Scripture introduce what are boldly claimed to be new insights, when in reality they are barely touched up echoes from earlier debates" (2010:10). Furthermore, consulting primary sources of those opposed to inerrancy is considered beneficial to the veracity of this study (both within and outside Christian circles). Bart

Ehrman, a hugely influential New Testament scholar, examples one who moved from an orthodox view of Scripture to completely outside Christianity. Ehrman's (2005:1) central premise in his populist work, *Misquoting Jesus*, is the "scribes who copied scripture and sometimes changed it".

Now, the motive for study is bolstered by a logical premise needed to initiate the legitimacy of inerrancy: if God exists and has created humanity for an objective purpose, preserved communication of it is necessary for the fruition of this purpose in accord with his intention. The logical conclusion of Scripture as plausibly that communication follows if the existence of God and the objective purpose are, through various means, demonstrable. However, such a conclusion invokes the need for a particular conception of divine and human nature. With respect to the argument for divine existence, and the expansion of divine-human nature, works by notable authors of differing apologetic methods are consulted for a more holistic engagement. This study is sympathetic to the presuppositional, or reformed, apologetic method advocated by Frame, recognising the argument from absolute reality (especially as it relates to Scripture) (2015:3-4) and broad circular argument (2015:10-11) as effective. Craig (2008), using classical apologetics, informs this study of the philosophical-scientific dialogue on humanity and God within a theological framework.

As far as this study concerns itself with objectivity, it is in reference to universal truth as determined not only by historical and empirical facts, but tested truth claims, and logically consistent premises of reality, relative to the Christian faith. Therefore, this study refers to objectivity as determined by its philosophical conception, that is "associated with ideas such as reality, truth and reliability" (Mulder, n.d.). The latter aligns itself with questions regarding truth, which are "'borderline' questions shared between philosophy and theology" (Lamberigts *et al.*, 2006:1). Truth then embodies that broader element which encompasses these related disciplines and pertains to the epistemological theme of this study. Rightly, the endeavour for truth is interwoven between philosophy and theology, truth being that which is sought with each objective, and in any evaluation of nature. As such, this study respects the inquiry paradigm of Lamberigts *et al*. (2006:1), where "The problematic of theological truth (orthodoxy) can be said to involve two major issues, namely, the question of *the nature of theological truth*, and the question of *the determination of theological truth*".

The notion of objectivity is not simply prudent for this study, but obligatory, considering the fundamental tenants of the Christian faith. The historicity of Jesus of Nazareth in conjunction with the motif of absolutism in the teachings of Christ (the gospel, broadly) example objective implication. This objective essence of the Christian faith invariably lends itself to a certain exclusivity, necessitating the engagement of prevailing contemporary, postmodern, sentiment and its relative ideologies for comparison; herein related terms such as pluralism (specifically, ideological), relativism, and scepticism emerge for discussion. Now, Gill (2016:1) explains that theology plays a defining role in society, acknowledging also that Christian theological influence on pluralistic culture is a "much less obvious" matter. As we garner from Newbigin (1989:1), this is partly due to pluralistic society being "conceived to be a free society, a society not controlled by accepted dogma but characterized rather by the critical spirit". However, writing on pluralism, Johnson explains somewhat ironically (2010:23) that "By applying a Christian imagination to the question of difference, we have an opportunity both to be critical of social reality and to undertake the ethical task of creating alternative pictures of communal and political life" (2010:23). Reno (2009) points to the famous maxim of Neuhaus which validates Johnson's practical perspective: "Culture is the root of politics, and religion is the root of culture". Both politics and culture are major spheres within society – politics is a subsidiary interest to this study (particularly, political liberalism). Notably, Johnson highlights a progression in political liberalism toward a conception of governance based to a greater degree on human ontology rather than epistemology (2010:20-21). On a related note, the philosophical conception of objectivity must be juxtaposed with divine ontology – the objective Standard – as far as divine ontology is biblically disclosed, with human ontology only coherent with respect to its Source. Here Craig (2008:75) relates: "In a world without a divine lawgiver, there can be no objective right and wrong, only our culturally and personally relative, subjective judgements". This study in turn maintains that any accurate theological truth at all depends on divine self-disclosure. Referencing again the inquiry paradigm above, this study maintains that the nature of theological truth is derived by means of theology proper. And Scripture is that which this study affirms as pivotal to what determines theological truth, carrying divine self-disclosure with additional doctrine (cf. Frame, 2015:3).

The problem is therefore stated in the following way: Christian adherence to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy (and the propositons of Scripture in general) is threatened by the pressures of postmodern ideologies and increasing pluralism (which is something of a catalyst to these ideologies). The doctrine of inerrancy is challenged by these ideologies both internally and externally (of the Church), to the detriment of the Christian, and others, in the recognition of Christian faith as objectively true.

1.2 Research problem, aim and objectives

To restate the problem with added specifics: Christian adherence to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy (and the propositions of Scripture in general) is threatened by the pressures of increasing pluralism and certain contemporary postmodern ideologies such as subjectivism, relativism, pluralism (ideological), and scepticism. McFaul (2006:201) foresees that the second half of the twenty-first century may lead to a "megatrend away from exclusivism and toward pluralism", characterising "the global village". Alongside these ideologies and the increasing pluralism which to an extent facilitates them, Scripture is perceived as errant and largely inapplicable. What's more, this view of Scripture is encouraged by higher-criticism, and in circles where liberal theology persists. Taking liberal theology as example: Shakespeare (2014:358) refers to an analogous image "implicit" in liberal theology, the "dawn", which he explains endorses independent human thought, "rather than slavishly following authority". He (2014:358) concludes: "We are no longer simply beholden to the past for our sense of God". This sentiment implies that the Scriptures are outmoded, and unauthoritative. Notably, according to Hobson (2014:12), the latter half of the twentieth century marked the academic decline of such liberal theology, grounded in Enlightenment principles, which he labels "Liberal Theology A".[1] However, "this tradition did not suddenly disappear, it persisted, and still persists, in liberal (or 'progressive') sections of the churches" (Hobson, 2014:15). Another example is in the neo-orthodox dilution of the authority of Scripture, which is another influence on the contemporary Christian. The highly influential C.S. Lewis (2017) appears sympathetic to the neo-orthodox understanding of Scripture. Lewis (2017:130) comments on the "total result" of the Psalms as "not 'the Word of God', in the sense that every passage, in itself, gives impeccable science or history. It carries the Word of God". The problem is that this sentiment can be extrapolated to endorse a selective approach to the doctrines of the Bible. Ultimately, the danger is the perceived lack of objectivity in Christian faith when it is not definitively grounded in an absolutely authoritative source.

Now, biblical inerrancy is defensible with respect to alleged textual discrepancies (the narrative accounts of the centurion's servant, for example [Matt 8:5-13; cf. Luke 7:1-10]). While substantiating the evidences for inerrancy with respect to such alleged discrepancies is to be done in grammatical and historical context, Merrick and Garrett remind of the invariable need to substantiate the doctrine of inerrancy itself in doctrinal context, or with respect to the "doctrinal

1 Hobson (2014:12-15) refers to two categories of liberal theology, "A" and "B". He defines "A" as "that which seeks to reform Christianity in the direction of rationalism and optimism about natural human capacities" and "B" as "the tradition that affirms a deep affinity between the gospel and political and cultural liberty". The theological, political, and cultural inter-dimensions are again faced.

nexus" (2013:16), wherein such terms as inspiration and revelation denote corresponding doctrines. Concerning objective truth as it pertains to inerrancy, it is furthermore agreeable that "inerrancy is not merely a statement of fact but also a position toward the Bible – a way of reading the Bible, a criterion for what counts as faithful interpretation" (Merrick & Garrett, 2013:11). The latter sentiment in addition to proper grammatical and historical context is the substance of healthy hermeneutics. Additionally, the authority of Scripture is not merely determined by fact as something is "in modern scientific culture … . The Bible's authority must be understood according to the authority of God and thus should not be reduced to the authority of fact" (Merrick & Garrett, 2013:16-17). However, this is not to discount factual bases for inerrancy. Nevertheless, here also the importance of divine ontology emerges, and is indispensable to any substantiation of inerrancy (amounting to a deductive defence).

In response to the research problem, the question is asked: To what extent can the evidences for biblical inerrancy prevent doctrinal compromise among believers in a contemporary culture of pluralism? This will be the primary question of the study.

The following questions are derivative of the primary question:

- What are the implications of divine ontology and human ontology as they are biblically defined?
- What is the nature of, and evidence for, biblical inerrancy?
- What is the nature of contemporary context and how does biblical inerrancy apply?

With respect to the primary question, the aim may be stated in the following way. To demonstrate, by the various substantiations, biblical inerrancy, and that it is to be the resolution of the believer against postmodern ideologies, allowing objective faith.

Given that the research relates to an audience of believers in a postmodern pluralistic context, the reasoned argument for the existence of God is intended to demonstrate that absolute truth is necessitated following the existence of absolute reality; this also engages those sceptical of theism, by default. The logic for the argument of the intentionality of God follows as an implication of his credible existence. Thereafter, the intent is to demonstrate that He will, in accord with his intentionality, communicate what is absolutely true, that then being what is objectively important. The latter is proposed as a logical ground for biblical inerrancy. This is juxtaposed with the real obstacles of the contemporary context, readily documented. Once the aforementioned is logically demonstrated, one must point to a fulfilment of communication of absolute truth. Scripture is then reasserted as that which is indicated to fulfil divine communication of absolute truth through historical and epistemological proofs. The intended theme is historical and contextual with supplementary epistemological aspects, to reaffirm a dogmatic case for the inerrancy of Scripture. If the inerrancy (and authority) of Scripture is logically satisfying by means of the necessary arguments, it can serve as a warning for the believer against postmodernism and ideological pluralism and as instruction to what is objectively true/important.

In reaching the aim, the complementary objectives are:

- To evaluate the nature of God and human nature with respect to God.
- To evaluate the nature of and evidence for biblical inerrancy.
- To evaluate the nature of the contemporary context with respect to biblical inerrancy.

1.3 Central theoretical argument

Scripture as inspired of God is evidentially inerrant, providentially preserved, and the source of objective Christian faith for resolve against opposing ideologies.

1.4 Research methodology

This study is congruent with Reformed Tradition and orthodox evangelical perspective. The historical-grammatical method is applied in exegesis of the witness of Scripture to all pertinent topics[2] and the witness of Scripture serves as the backbone of each evaluative objective, also with respect to the doctrinal context of inerrancy. The nature of God and humankind (first objective) is studied with adherence to theology proper, and by adhering to theological anthropology, derived from Scripture using the historical-grammatical method. Classical and presuppositional apologetic methods are also engaged. In evaluating the nature of, and evidence for, inerrancy (second objective), the historical-grammatical method is applied in determining the objectivity of the texts, together with the epistemological method and doctrinal context. Regarding the evaluation of contemporary context with respect to the application of biblical inerrancy (third objective), the historical-grammatical method is maintained while considering the relevant Scriptures and literature, together with an apologetic method. Conclusions are reached through consolidation of contextual, historical and epistemological factors.

[2] It is maintained that the historical-grammatical method is most appropriate (cf. Geisler & Roach, 2011:296).

CHAPTER 2 THE NATURE OF GOD AND HUMANKIND

2.1 Introduction

This study presupposes the existence of God, that He has spoken, and the Scriptures are presupposed as evidence of God having spoken to humankind. On this matter, this study sides with Reformed apologetics as defended by Frame (2015:xxxi). Furthermore, that God exists, and that He has spoken is presupposed as the *sine qua non* of reality's existence and subsistence, as is generally revealed in creation (Rom 1:19); serving to facilitate the crowning glory of creation, humankind, described as the *imago Dei* (Ps 8:5; Gen 1:26-27). Noting the intrinsic relation between divine word and creation means that the matter of the divine word, in its various senses, cannot simply be dismissed as religious anecdote. Admittedly, for these concurrent presuppositions to be reasonable, their logical consistency must be evident. It is fitting, therefore, that we begin with a sentiment that mirrors the refined maxim of Anselm (2000:93): "I believe in order to understand [*credo ut intellegam*]". This study holds that in matters of reality's source especially, presupposition is validated, necessary even, evidenced by the myriad of working theories which presuppose physical mechanisms toward a reasonable source conclusion (cf. Craig, 2008:114).

The primary question of this chapter is as follows. What are the implications of divine ontology and human ontology as they are biblically defined? Since we here contend that God as reality's source is the most logical presupposition, we consider the existence of God as axiomatic. Furthermore, the Bible, taken as the source text witnesses to God as the absolute reality, and is foundational to assertions of truth, and to this inerrancy invariably pertains. However, the reasoning of Warfield and Hodge is sound, that beginning with evidence for scriptural authority is misplaced, and that "In dealing with skeptics … we should first establish theism" (2015:8). Since scepticism is increasing proportionally to orthodox Christian faith (Keller, 2018:xi), reinforcing theism is not only necessary to engage the sceptic, but is well founded for the Christian thinker in the contemporary context. Ironically, the maxim of Anselm, which exemplifies the very opposite spirit of scepticism, guides this endeavour; which is to reinforce theism specifically by exploring the nature of divine ontology. In so doing deistic, naturalistic, and open-theistic notions are variously considered and opposed. Furthermore, some implications become evident following the defence of God as a credible explanation for reality, in the way God is biblically defined. So too for humanity, following the biblical conception of the *imago Dei*. Indeed, if God exists according to his biblical conception, human apathy on the matter is entirely misplaced, and holds only from the false security of ignorance. The succinct statement of Wood (2014:1) captures the intensity of the point: "If theism is true, it is a matter of incalculable weightiness".

For those who are not predisposed to scepticism, belief in the existence of God is considered properly basic (Plantinga, 2000:84). This does not guarantee belief in, or knowledge of, the appropriate nature of the God that exists, however. Nevertheless, even if God is understood simply as the *fons homonis*, Creator of all, humankind indisputably owes its nature to Him. Therefore, the linked ontological questions "Who is God?", and "Who is humankind?" are the profoundest one can ask. The former of the two questions is likely the highest; how we answer this question determines our view of God and ourselves as derived from Him. Agreeably, as Erickson (2001:86) surmises, "One's view of God might even be thought of as supplying the whole framework within which one's theology is constructed and life is lived". It follows rightly, that "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us" (Tozer, 1961:1). It appears that such an understanding was becoming general in the early twentieth century, as Belden (1919:12) observes: "Men and women everywhere are awakening to the profound significance of the character given to God in human thought. They are seeing clearly enough that a nation is made or marred by the object of its supreme devotion." The fight remains for such an understanding to become universal, and it is a fight that is met with more cultural opposition today than ever. The two aforementioned questions are crucially important for determining foundational aspects of objective truth, with which this study is very much concerned. Lewis (2001a:1), in his book on the supernatural, draws an important principle from Aristotle: "Those who wish to succeed must ask the right preliminary questions". Such is the nature of the consideration of the aforementioned questions in this study.

2.2 Identifying God

What is meant by "God"? Of whom are we speaking? Craig (2008:154) describes the well-established perspective: "…a personal Creator of the universe exists, who is uncaused, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and unimaginably powerful. This, as Thomas Aquinas was wont to remark, is what everybody means by 'God'". Comparatively, the contemporary secular understanding of God, as quoted of Stephen Hawking, is, succinctly, "an outside agency, code named God" (Craig, 2008:162) – the perspective of God often conceptual and impersonal. These notions and concepts, even if mere outlines or partial truths, can be traced to Scripture.

A notable introductory element of Scripture is the evident interconnectedness between God existing, his speaking, and the universe existing. “In the beginning God…”[3] (Gen 1:1) is the biblical presupposition. And God’s creative impetus follows the operative word “Let”, with unimpeded fruition (Gen 1:3-27). We garner by what is described as the result of God speaking, and the accounted relation of God to creation, aspects of his most fundamental nature. We may deduce from the creation account the omni-essence of God. For example, the beginning as God in relation to *all* things surely may imply omnipresence; God being outside creation. And assuming creation of such complexities as this universe is the result of the “mere” will and word of God creating *ex nihilo*, the conclusion of omnipotence is well furnished. Similarly, what boundless knowledge must be had to set the universe into motion with no reference but Himself – we may surely infer omniscience. Importantly, by the biblical standard, God is “outside” of creation (בְּרֵאשִׁית אֱלֹהִים, “in beginning God”, Gen 1:1), or more properly, his complete “otherness” is conveyed. As Tozer (1961:25) observes, “Origin is a word that can apply only to things created … By our effort to discover the origin of things we confess our belief that everything was made by Someone who was made of none”. So, it is something of a conundrum as to how the created can come to identify or conceive of God, let alone his attributes. This conundrum does at least diminish with biblical context; what never diminishes is the profundity of the matter. The above imposes the reality that, “properly speaking” (Hodge, 1997:336), God is incomprehensible, not only by God existing transcendently and independently of the created order but given the implication of his limitless nature. It is here contended that the fundamental nature of God is his omni-essence, that He is unlimited in every expression of Himself. This essence is more naturally stated in terms of infinity, involving the denial “that there are or can be any limitations to the divine Being or attributes” (Berkhof, 1938:59). A matter of emphasis is that infinity must more particularly be ascribed to divine ontology. Berkhof (1938:59) expounds the approach: “The infinity of God must be conceived as intensive rather than extensive”. It is agreeable that infinity cannot apply coherently to the created order, given its material nature, which by all known accounts is inherently limited. This touches on controversial mathematical theory involving the unlikelihood of an actual infinite “א” expressed in reality, and differing from the potential infinite “∞” (Craig, 2008:116-117). Based on scientific support of the universe having begun to exist a finite time ago (the Standard Model), Craig (2008:96) conveys the logical problem that a “series of past events comes to an end in the present – but the infinite cannot come to an end”. Given this, the infinite cannot pertain to anything material which stands within finite cause-effect relations. Referencing Craig, Wood (2014:39-40) engages with scholarship that addresses the dilemma of denying the possibility of an actual infinite if God is in the reality equation. It appears that the logical difficulty with an actual infinite mostly pertains to its incoherence in the physical universe; it is altogether a different context with an

[3] Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotes are taken from the English Standard Version.

immaterial, eternal Being. Infinitude, just as eternality, reinforces the incomprehensibility of God. Although the divine attributes reinforce the incomprehensibility of God, that is not to say they render God incoherent. Rather, being consistent with the incomprehensibility of God inevitably leads to the abdication of reason. It is incoherent to assume the fullness of God's nature can be reasoned. Rightly, reason must bow, it must concede to its Creator as anything else created. And so, the old and sage instruction of Lyte (1820:25) applies in every age: "Reason must quit her didactic chair, and sit and learn at the feet of Reason's God". Does one mean by this that reason be barred from the set of human faculties with which we engage God? Far from it (Isa 1:18) – reason need only assume a humble position, only then learning what it could not through its own exertion (cf. Prov 3:5). Such a position simply acknowledges the attested superiority of God's thoughts and ways, referencing precisely the grandeur of creation that infers something of the essence of God (Isa 55:9). What we have with this position of reason is a fitting example of the Anselmic precedence of belief towards understanding; never forgetting that understanding, reason, and knowing are part of the equation. It is crucial that we do not at the term 'incomprehensible' applied to God think that He cannot be known at all. As Miley (1892:153) explains of knowing God, "There may be true knowledge – true in the measure of it – which is not comprehensive of its subject".

The cogency of the *omni* attributes has been the subject of much deliberation, with many attempting to identify God as nothing more than a self-contradictory concept. Stahl (2013:36), writing on the populist atheist level, for example, draws on the familiar argument of God being unable to create a rock so heavy He cannot lift as part of a legitimate argument in demonstrating the self-contradiction of omnipotence. And, similarly, citing the omnipresence of God as leading to his damnation of Himself by his presence in hell, and therefore also self-contradictory (Stahl, 2013:34). As to the rock "paradox", firstly, we may use Lewis' (1943:16) acuity on omnipotence as a rejoinder: "Omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense". Ironically, the argument tries to prove self-contradiction, but it itself is self-contradictory; anything finite (created) cannot have an infinite attribute (in this case, weight). The rock "paradox" in fact reduces to show the exclusivity of infinitude to the category of the Creator. As to the argument of apparent contradiction inherent in omnipresence, secondly, it is shown as void by appropriate context. Regarding divine presence, Scripture is particular about intensity (2 Chr 7; Exod 3:1-6) (glory, holiness), while maintaining the all-encompassing extent of divine presence (Ps 139:7-12); the context proving consistency. A logical difficulty in the *interplay* between omni attributes is sometimes argued as rendering the possessor of such qualities incoherent. Wood (2014:61) presents the matter on account of the proponents: "God is said to be both perfect in goodness and perfect in power. If he is perfect in power then he can surely do anything a mere mortal can do, such as to commit injustice. But if he is perfect in goodness, God could never contravene justice". Again, the argument smuggles in a self-contradictory presupposition of perfect power by means of human paradigms of power. In other words, God's *perfect* power is placed in the human category. However, injustice has no part in any context of perfection, so the conclusion of impotence cannot follow (cf. Num 23:19). Furthermore, to suggest the incoherence of the simultaneity of omni attributes presumes an adequate grasp of the omni attributes themselves, which by their nature are beyond finite comprehension. It is an audacious leap, therefore, to make any such claim of incompatibility. Still, there are many similar arguments, the most difficult of which is perhaps the problem of evil, which is engaged further on.

Now, if God is infinite we cannot mean by "attributes" "parts" of divine nature that result in a whole; a parts-to-whole expression is incompatible with infinitude. The known attributes of God are readily accessible, with much writing invested to their description. They are no less relevant to recount here, in part, as they witness to implications for humankind. Although not assuming impossibility, there is difficulty in conceiving how an appropriate balance between attributes can be had if any one of them is actually infinite – indeed it is unclear if the term 'balance' could even apply in the context of infinitude. And we encounter descriptions in Scripture where God is variously "totalised", for example: God *is* love (1 John 4:8), and God *is* light (1 John 1:5), being somehow totally both. However, here it is important to note the "intensity" and not the "extent" of the attribute, which is expressly ontological. Tozer (1961:98) explains away any literal inference from the description "God is love" on the grounds that any one thing cannot equal God. Not conceding an interpretation of absolute equality to the predicate description, such a description is nevertheless the closest expression possible to convey how God is the absolute standard of any disclosed attribute, because He is infinitely that attribute. Much the same could be said of all the attributes disclosed of God never being equal to Him, yet He is no less infinitely those things. Moreover, it would hold true of an infinite being that one cannot truly speak of the end of one attribute and the beginning of another. It is the infinitude of God that arguably best furnishes what is known as the divine simplicity, that is the understanding that "God's attributes are not abstract qualities that God happens to exemplify. They are, rather, identical to God himself" (Frame, 2015:265). Perhaps the profoundest aspect of God's nature lies hidden in the construction "Let us" (Gen 1:26), undergirding the creation account with suggestive relational personhood. This relational personhood is later confirmed in the unfolding narrative of Scripture, by which we may identify the intrinsic unity of God; such that the only way we can add to the description of God's omni-essence is to say that his omni-essence is perfectly unified – this is more comprehensive than describing his essence as balanced, or equally distributed. At this point we must discuss important individual attributes in a more in-depth manner.

2.2.1 Divine presence

The nature of the divine presence, needed to establish anything tangible on divine ontology, is likely the most misunderstood of God, perhaps because it most closely relates to the existence of God. Presence, *praesentia,* “a being present” etymologically parallels existence, *exsistere*, “to stand forth; emerge”; in light of the root “exsistere” (ex “forth” + *sistere* “cause to stand”) it follows as an interesting description of God. Nevertheless, to describe divine presence at least plays into a demonstration of the viability of divine existence as it is plainly understood. This is primarily a theological and philosophical endeavour, since divine presence falls outside the realm of empirical testing[4] – not a convenience, but a necessary acknowledgment given the divine nature. When seriously considering God existing outside of those fundamental elements of the physical universe, time, space, and matter, as an “outside agency” (cf. 2 Chr 2:6; Acts 17:24), it follows that divine self-disclosure is necessary; where God indeed “emerges”, or “stands forth”, proving Himself present in time. Indeed, if the attribute of *omnipresence* is consistently applied, God must be present both outside of the physical universe and throughout the physical universe from its inception; the former presence preceding the latter. The limited comprehension of this attribute is underscored more so by the notion of presence beyond our dimensions than presence at all points simultaneously within the physical universe. Conceiving a simultaneous presence is somewhat possible, but a timeless, spaceless presence, is simply beyond our frame of reference. Apprehension is further impeded when, despite omnipresence, God does not appear overtly present; as it is quoted of Luther: “…how He is present – this is beyond our thought” (Snodgrass 2016:416). We must appeal to the immateriality of God (cf. 1 Tim 6:16; John 1:18), as well as degrees of intensity, together with timelessness, and spacelessness – omnipresence only with respect to such elements is consistent. Now, God’s instigation of the universe logically substantiates transcendence, and his presence in time is consistent with immanence (Matt 28:20b), but being both substantiates the nature of the divine as relational.

To connect the matter to Creation; if God supersedes the physical universe, and is yet immanent, there is no contradiction in Him being the beginning and the end at once, and universally

[4] This is discussed at length further on. For now, we maintain that the enterprise of natural theology does indeed draw on evidences of divine instigation, and although these are indirect evidences, the burden of proof nevertheless remains on the naturalist to provide a satisfactory natural instigation of the universe (cf. Rom 1:20).

permeating[5]. The implication of divine omnipresence is divine transcendence infinitely proportional to divine immanence (cf. Jer 23:24; Acts 17:27). This does not in any way suggest pantheism, or a "process theology" that espouses interdependence between God and the created order. Precisely because of transcendence *beyond creation,* pantheistic notions "that God and the universe constitute an organic unity" (Shedd, 2003:182) can never be maintained. Shedd clarifies poignantly: "If God is infinite and the universe finite, as theism affirms, the latter is immanent in and dependent on the former, but not organically one with it". What's more, this category distinction is vital to understanding existence as an attribute of God.

2.2.1.1 Existence as attribute

Existence, as it is plainly understood, is a pre-requisite to presence, but existence as attribute is a special claim that changes the essence of the discussion on being and nature. Existence as an attribute in fact absolutises the existence of a being. Were it not for the absolute nature of the biblical God, discussing existence as his attribute would be superfluous. We will discuss, firstly, the logical argument that establishes God as absolute being – the ontological argument. This traditional argument was proposed by Anselm (2000:93-94), beginning with the notion that God is "something than which nothing greater can be thought". He argues further: "But surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be only in the understanding … it could be thought to exist also in reality – something which is greater". And that "this [being] exists so truly [i.e., really] that it cannot even be thought not to exist" (insertions the translators'). The profound simplicity of this argument proceeds largely from the simple but profound Anselmic faith maxim. Dismissing the argument as idealistic is untenable. As Craig (2008:95) explains, "This deceptively simple argument is still hotly debated today". Among its contemporary adherents, Plantinga (1982:196) is arguably the most notable with his *modal* ontological argument. Plantinga (1982:198) summarises Anselm's argument as a *reductio ad absurdum,* but adds (1982:202) to it with the logical demonstration that God as possessing a "maximal degree of greatness" must, by virtue of the beginning of the Anselmic argument, mean greatness "not exceeded by the greatness of any being in *any possible world*" (emphasis added). Such a conception of the argument includes in the perspective of the absoluteness of God, his being absolute even in a potentially infinite number of worlds, his infinitude thereby affirmed.

[5] We note here that instances of varying intensity of immanence is a mark of the relational dynamic, while also marking the glorious and holy distinction of God compared with the material order.

Taking the field of philosophy broadly, the idea of existence as an attribute is a controversial notion, as Kant helped stimulate (Frame, 2015:122). Much as raising the ontological argument is "often met with puzzled outrage or even baffled rage" while pointing to it being "*circular* or *question-begging*" (Plantinga, 1982:217). Plantinga (1982:218) himself concludes it a less convincing piece of natural theology, not faulting its logic, despite some formulations indeed leading to question begging unless the conclusion (that God exists) is agreed to from the outset. In fact, what is most striking about the ontological argument is that it applies the inherent logic in presuppositional apologetics: proving God by the necessity of God's existence – in effect acknowledging the necessity of an absolute standard. As Frame (2015:123) observes: "the prayer in which Anselm formulates his argument identifies him as a sort of Christian presuppositionalist".

David Hume was also known for his polemic against the notion of God's necessary existence, agreeing on the idea that one could equally imagine the non-existence of God, or anything (Hume, 2017a:39). Summarising Hume's perspective in his *Dialogues*, Russel and Kraal (2017) convey the sentiment: "If it is possible to conceive of the material world as not existing the same is true of God, we can imagine him 'to be non-existent, or his attributes to be altered'". Now, we must stress that this presupposes a thorough understanding of what non-existence or nothing "is" – we know, of course, from theory that nothing (especially in this context) is "the absence of anything". How can one conceptualise this? Strange as it is, we in fact have no frame of reference for nothing. We can't imagine the vacuum of space as being nothing since, strictly speaking, that is still *something* – space, a material dimension. The implication is that Hume imagined "nothing" as "something". Moreover, Hume (2017b:87) proposes that "*the necessity of a cause to every beginning of existence* has no demonstrative or intuitive support". This is akin to suggesting that something can come into existence from nothing. Assuming "nothing" could be imagined, Craig (2008:112) explains Hume's error: "Just because I can imagine an object, say a horse, coming into existence from nothing, that in no way proves that a horse really could come into existence that way". Similarly, "Hume is misled by his powers of imagination to suppose that everything we can imagine is causally possible" (Hughes, 2005:147). Furthermore, Hume's logic seems only to apply to a conception of God in the same category as the material. If we uphold God's infinitude, we cannot suppose that the finite imagination could fashion alternate divine attributes, and then call the imagined being "God". How shall one add to, or subtract from, the infinite? Any such attempt exposes the effort as ultimately inconsistent with infinitude, and one ends with an imagined being having the label "God". Had Hume been attacking idolatry his logic may have been consistent. Granted, observing the natural order leads to an understanding of the relative contingency of all things, such that describing anything physical that exists as existing does not say anything that is particular about that entity (cf. Hume, 2017a:39). However, discussing the instigation and conclusion of contingency is nowadays unavoidable, considering the tenability of the Standard Model and the laws of thermodynamics – i.e. the universe must have a cause. As Hawking (1996) stated, "All the evidence seems to indicate, that the universe has not existed forever". Furthermore, the more classical notion of the universe having a beginning is noted as more robust than certain contemporary cosmological theories (Hawking, 2010:16; Craig, 2008:139-140). General scepticism of the consistency of the contingent expression (or finitude) of matter is an increasingly thin veil to hide behind. These scientific findings only amplify the internal incoherence of suggesting something coming from nothing. There remains need for an absolute or irreducible; it cannot be nothing, and it cannot be finite matter.[6] God, on account of his infinite nature, is the only suitable irreducible underpinning of all existence – infinitude likewise substantiating his necessary existence. Indeed, the moment anything originates its existence is defaulted. However, because God is uncaused, He neither originates nor ends; He is therefore infinite. It is by non-contingent existence that God stands singularly unique, uncategorical, infinite and thereby absolute. We conclude, therefore, on the similitude between necessary existence (non-contingency) and irreducibility, and that both are tenable only by means of infinitude, and so also interchangeable with infinitude. Whereas matter by nature cannot withstand an infinite reductive inquiry (*reductio ad absurdum*), God absorbs all such inquiry by his infinitude, so that all such questions find their answer in Him. Incidentally, it is sensible that the infinite should apply only to a single divine being, since it is insensible to invoke multiple infinites. So it is that God exists absolutely, or perfectly, and humanity, contingent on Him irreducibly, in Him lives and moves and has being (cf. Acts 17:28). In speaking of the necessary causation and contingency of the universe we have in fact invoked the cosmological argument for God's existence. Notably, describing God's nature with respect to the universe's nature helps emphasise God's nature. Therefore, the ontological and cosmological arguments for God's existence make for a good combination argument. To demonstrate more precisely, the arguments are stated after each other, amended[7] in the following way:

The ontological argument:

1. A maximally great being conceivably exists.
2. A maximally great being is one than which no being greater can be conceived.
3. No greater being can be conceived than one non-contingent (infinite).
4. No greater being can be conceived than God to whom this attribute applies.
5. But a being is greater if existing in actuality as well as in conception.

[6] This is explored in more detail further on as it relates to humanity's existence specifically.

[7] These arguments are adapted from Craig (2008:95-97, 184), who condenses the Anselmic and Plantingian ontological arguments, and the Thomist cosmological argument, among others. The ontological argument presented here mostly takes after the Anselmic version, but uses the phrase "maximal greatness" coined in the Plantingian version (cf. Craig, 2008:184). The cosmological argument presented here mostly takes after the "Second Way" of the Thomist cosmological argument (cf. Craig, 2008:97). The central difference is the demonstration of the interchangeability between infinitude and non-contingency.

6. Therefore, God, as the maximally great being, must actually exist.

The cosmological argument:

1. The universe is seen to be contingent (finite) by its beginning.
2. The universe depends on something non-contingent (infinite) for its beginning.[8]
3. Therefore, God is the best explanation for the beginning of the universe.

Now we arrive, secondly, at the deeper biblical congruence with the more philosophical engagement above. Maintaining God's self-existence makes much sense of that glorious and holy theophany Moses experienced (Exod 3:2-14), wherein God disclosed something of his deeper essence, indeed his personal name: אֶהְיֶה (*ehyeh*, from היה *hyh* 'to be') 'I AM', or אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, 'I AM WHO I AM'. There is, however, nuance to hold in tension. It has been noted (Bechtold, 2016) that the tense flexibility of this Hebrew statement, which allows for the translation 'I will be who I will be', does not constitute a personal name except in the case of shortening to אֶהְיֶה ('I AM'). The latter relates to the root (also היה) of the more official construction of the name, יהוה (LORD, YHWH, Yahweh) – the tetragrammaton. Understanding that the root of the divine name is the state of being itself leaves no room to doubt the assertion of the biblical God to self-existence, effectively personalising existence by means of his name. Such would indeed establish sovereign lordship, and make fitting the translation 'LORD'. The Name also echoes the divine simplicity (or, irreducibility) while loaded with parallel implications that are needless to mention apart from appreciating the given facets testifying to the majesty of the essence of God. As Gowens (2016:56) elaborates, "The self-existent *Jehovah* is, by definition, essentially *self-sustaining*, *self-determining*, *self-governing*, and *self-sufficient*. Each of these attributes is conveyed by the name I AM". If we ponder on the meaning of the name of God, it is plain why Hebrew tradition keeps from directly mentioning the name of God (substituting instead *Hashem* 'the Name'). This tradition was so well kept, in fact, that we may have lost the true vocalisation of the divine name. Nevertheless, the essence of the Name is comprehensive enough to declare aseity, despite being carried by the simple frame of four letters. Although it is comprehensive of the essence of God, there are yet more important attributes that detail the nature of God. We cannot, therefore, conclude on the simplicity of God.

[8] Metaphysical models of the universe, recognising that the scientific data point to the universe being caused, inevitably imply infinite physical regression when postulating various perpetual mechanisms, so as to escape the evidence for an absolute beginning of the universe; or else entertain the explicit logical contradiction of something coming from nothing (cf. Craig, 2008:136-137). These matters are engaged again further on.

2.2.1.2 God as spirit

That God is spirit, is not derived from strained interpretation of the Scriptures; it is directly attested (John 4:24; 2 Cor 3:17; Phil 3:3). Now, the temptation may be to imagine the spiritual realm as ethereal (in the insubstantial, frail, sense), as though the vastness of an omnipresent God *obligates* Him to stretch thinly; after which one may confuse the invisibility of God (cf. 1 Tim 1:17) as *dilution*, to the point of questioning his existence. Such is the deistic confusion, conceiving of the vastness of God in terms of what is finite, and never able to appropriately communicate the *realness* of the presence of God. Lewis' (2001b:162-163) analogy perhaps best captures this greater spiritual reality. He relates our world's three dimensions, each in sequence higher than the previous, to the notion of the spiritual world embodying a dimension yet higher than, but also in touch with, the familiar three; much as the third dimension while higher than the two still includes them. Lewis employed the theme of the inferior reality of the material world quite extensively (1943:134, 136), analogising whatever is far from the intensity of God as more akin to *shadow* than *solid* (Lewis, 2001c:39). If Lewis was not influenced by *Plato's Republic*, he nevertheless echoes it. Plato (1888:214) himself employs the imagery of passing objects by dim light in a "cave" with the resulting shadows observed by prisoners fastened to that direction; his metaphoric description for the experience of this life. How true it is, if we maintain that God is realer than anything, his existence follows as un-comparatively *solid*, uncontainable, definable only by Himself, and indeed absolute. It is no wonder, as Pinnock (2006:208-209) expands, the early church fathers had trouble forming a theology of the Spirit. There is an indirect acknowledgment early on of how humanity grasps at a higher dimension, in need of that dimension's condescension. Another commonplace notion of God as "unembodied mind" (Craig, 2008:108) while at first aligning with a conception of the spiritual does not convey the same robust conception of God as "spirit", it instead seems a diminution, even if it has in mind a description of the divine simplicity. "Unembodied mind" seems more fitting to describe the functional essence of God, whereas 'spirit' remains a truer description of the essence of his Being. Pannenberg (2001:783) touches on this distinction when, drawing from modern physics, he writes: "the conclusion is suggested that God is spirit as something like a field of force rather than as intellect". However, noting elements of truth in both aforementioned descriptions we may observe that the spirit of God is not simply abstract "force" (however vast a field), but at the very least, if only left with this uncoloured outline, an *intentional* "force". Most importantly, the evidential interaction of God throughout history confirms such an outline, and colours it with detail.

2.2.1.3 God in time

How shall we describe God in time except to say that for humanity it is that all important divine condescension to something less real, something of lower dimension. This says much of God's transcendence, since within our material order time, a prolific topic[9] on its own, might be most difficult to comprehend. Therefore, discussing God in time is a tentative enterprise. With considerable irony to the deistic metaphor of the wound-up watch set off to wind down, the biblical God is considered by some as temporal after He created, with his presence permeating through space-time (Eccl 3:11; Ps 31:15). Others, Anselm and Augustine among them, interpret the *eternality* of God as the timelessness of God; the eternal God transcending time (Jude v.25). Scripture attests to both. Perhaps, in order to avoid intrinsic contradiction, it is important that we refer to the temporality of God in terms of his locus in time, not his essential ontology (cf. Heb 13:8). This distinction assists the expression "the *eternal* God (present) in time", in much the same way, God as spirit presences Himself in the material order. Understanding this distinction in terms of sovereignty is helpful, as in Malachi 3:8, "For I am the LORD, I change not". Changelessness is qualified by sovereign lordship over time, despite also being in time (Ps 102:27). What convolutes the matter somewhat, is the evident interchangeability between the latter more *eternal-everlasting* sense of God, and the more *eternal-timeless* sense of God (Gen 1:1; 2 Tim 1:9b; Titus 1:2), such that Kellenberger (2015:1) describes these two words (everlasting and eternal) as "multifarious". Craig (2002) also holds this in tension, concluding that "it's impossible to decide this question biblically. We must turn to rational, theological and philosophical reflection in order to adjudicate the nature of divine eternity". Craig (2002), agreeing with Polkinghorne that the Newtonian notion of absolute time is demonstrably obsolete by means of special relativity, goes a step further in saying "relativity theory actually teaches us nothing about the nature of time but everything about our physical measures of time". Consensus with the notion of time as metaphysical appears to create complexities in describing God's relation to time, as distinct from matter, leading to such terms as "omnitemporality" (Craig, 2002). However, maintaining the relativity of time, even its metaphysicality, or whether static or dynamic, it is still possible to understand time in terms of a created dimension that God occupies, while sovereign in and over it, by virtue of his omnipresence. Thereby, "omnitemporality" is but a facet of omnipresence. Craig (2002) fears that resting in the "minimalist" "biblical affirmation that God is without beginning and end and [that He] exists permanently" is weak persuasively, and open to the danger of misuse. The latter fear is understandable, but less so the former. Holding the eternal-timeless and the eternal-everlasting in tension may be minimalist, but it is not without depth. To suggest that God is temporal after He created, and that He cannot exist also timelessly attempts to restrict an infinite God to the

[9] This study does not have capacity to explore the various theories of time, and therefore engages with the topic broadly, more in terms of dimensionality to the inclusion of history.

dimension of time. If time, whether static or dynamic, is indeed *created* it cannot be infinite, and so cannot find *complete* confluence with God's infinite presence. The following interpretation is offered to alleviate the interchangeability: relative to time God is the beginning and the end, that is, He is time's beginning and end (Rev 22:13), but within Him time is beginninglessly and endlessly encapsulated. Nevertheless, these important nuances aside, God is actively involved in precisely how time winds down – to what end and from what beginning. Biblically, the present space-time universe will come to an end (2 Pet 3:7), and in what dimensional sense the everlasting new creation will exist is beyond what the mind can imagine (1 Cor 2:9). So far as time as a whole may be an imperceptible dimension, we may have to content ourselves with God in time as the greatest overlapping mystery, in agreement with Frame (2015:180): "I have always felt that a great many mysteries in theology boil down to the mystery of time". It is as much a mystery how Jesus was slain from the foundation of the earth (Rev 13:8; 1 Pet 1:20). Likewise, there is that peculiar relativity of time in the context of God, where a day is as a thousand years and conversely (2 Pet 3:8); such is not comfortable to human reasoning, yet it is consistent with God as absolute. Fortunately, there are tangible aspects of time that are more comprehensible, namely human history (Gen 1:14), and it is within human history that the sovereignty of God is most directly experienced (Dan 2:21; Acts. 17:26).

2.2.1.4 God as holy

We come now to that attribute that motivates Israel's reticence at the vocalisation of the divine Name. It is that most professed declaration of the heavenly host (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8). The holiness of God; the word holy (קָדוֹשׁ – "*qadosh*") denoting a set-apartness which is qualified by unique nature demanding reverence, the latter being absolute in God. There is of course holiness in the description of Israel, set apart as a holy nation, but with noticeable distinction: "God is supremely or definitively holy and people, things, and actions may be considered holy through association with God" (Saldarini, 2011:386). Notice that in Isaiah 6:3 the threefold declaration of holiness is followed by the qualification of God's pre-eminent glory, and in Revelation 4:8 the same declaration is qualified by the eternal-everlasting existence of God. With both passages transcendence is clear. Berkhof (1938:73) also categorises the holiness of God as an attribute of transcendence, describing it aptly as "majesty-holiness", explaining furthermore that this holiness is related to what reveals Him. The divine Name and existence then all the more pertinent to this sense of holiness. Rightly, holiness is "an expression of the perfection of his being which transcends everything creaturely" (Britt, 1988:214). Indeed, it is variously suggested that holiness is "central" to God (Coppedge, 2001:16). Perhaps it is possible to understand the holiness of God as the concentration of his attributes as He presences Himself gloriously. Berkhof (1938:74) is careful to note at the outset that the nature of divine holiness is "twofold", "majesty-holiness" leading into God's "ethical holiness" as He "demands purity in his moral creatures". Notable also is the explicit intention to sanctify by glory itself (Exod 29:43). Here again is the "relational dynamic" that leads to the immanent glorious experience of God's holiness, in turn generating the aforementioned "associative" holiness (Exod 3:5; 40:34-35; Lev 5:15; 9:6; 9:23).

2.2.2 Divine power

One cannot conceive of the glory of the biblical God as a kind of benign light. Concurrent with the glorious holiness of God there is the unmistakable display of power (Exod 19:16; Lev 16:2; 1 Sam 5:2-4). The experience of Isaiah conveys the context quite explicitly when, after the heavenly host declare the holiness and glory of God, he pronounces his doom at having seen "the King, the LORD Almighty" (Isa 6:5 [NIV]; cf. Rev 19:6). Perhaps only the term "majesty" conveys glory as authoritative. This authoritative glory as absolute is even clearer in passages that delineate the end of the age (2 Thess 1:9; 2:8). All the while, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps 19:1), but also, unfathomably, "Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of [the stars] is missing" (Isa 40:26 [NIV]). Now, the existence of God is often questioned with reference to the confluent attribute, omnipotence. One needs only think of the colloquial invocation for a display of divine power for the validation of divine existence. Such an invocation has much irony if one considers the stars on the biblical presupposition. What, in the natural, could provide a more brilliant display of his power than the stars? But is there any inconsistency in the notion of *omni*potence? If we are consistent with the ontology of God, his absolute nature, logically necessary for his eternal self-existence, would likely demand intrinsic sustaining power. How is an actually infinite being *sustained* except by the confluent attribute of infinite strength? The words of Belden (1919:12) expounds this ontological point: "God is omnipotent. Strictly speaking, it is impossible to think of Him otherwise. Should He be less He cannot be the Ultimate Being, but only demi-god". Or, simply put: "a maximally great being is by definition omnipotent" (Craig, 2008:186). Nevertheless, omnipotence must be explained beyond the simple definition "all powerful". As Frame (2015:104) reminds, "Omnipotence does not mean the ability to do illogical things", concurring with Lewis (1943:16). This study agrees that the description of omnipotence as a being's ability to do all *things* (as opposed to non-objects) metaphysically possible is most tenable; specifically, the ability to do all things not intrinsically contradictory to said being. This accords with the proposition of Wierenga (1983:366-367) as he builds from the original Aquinian consideration of omnipotence as the ability to do all things possible, with its intrinsic nuances. Pearce and Pruss

(2012:412) package this type of argument for omnipotence in the logical consistency of “perfect efficacy plus perfect freedom”, they conclude: “… the puzzles about stones too heavy to lift or events that are morally intolerable can be handled. Such puzzles do not challenge perfect efficacy, but are rather challenges for perfect freedom. But reflection on the rationality involved in freedom shows that divine inability to will such things is compatible with perfect freedom”. The argument is particularly effective, since it accentuates the personal nature of omnipotence (appropriate to God as a being), augmenting unlimited power with dynamic intention (Pearce & Pruss, 2012:411).

2.2.2.1 God as good

Pivotal to scepticism of the nature of the biblical God is omnipotence in conjunction with the notion of omnibenevolence. As Feinberg (2013:5009) outlines, “Most attacks on theistic systems charge that their key theological claims, e.g. God is omnipotent, God is all-loving, and evil exists in a world created by God, taken together are self-contradictory”. Hill (2014:98) attempts to deny omnipotence on such notions of contradiction, expounding various “problems of fit” arguing that “the cost of giving up omnipotence is surprisingly small”. Hill (2014:101-102) believes the “metaphysically possible” argument, particularly that an omnipotent being is one who can bring about “any metaphysically possible state of affairs” and is “as good as it gets”. However, he then proposes a “God of a crazy theology” wherein he postulates an otherwise logically possible “state of affairs” being metaphysically precluded from God based on some theology that, to use his example, makes “God unable to directly move red objects”. He bolsters this idea with the logical “state of affairs” '2 + 2 = 4' as *possibly* being precluded from God's metaphysical possibilities, although plainly possible in the physical, and thereby disproving the omnipotence of God. The problem with this argument is that it presupposes the internal logic of a “God of a crazy theology”, or otherwise presupposes inconsistencies between the revelation of God's essential nature and what is known as logically possible. This argument against omnipotence is therefore built on a speculative foundation, attempting to imagine something logically possible (x) as intrinsically impossible for God because of some imagined metaphysical attribute (y) that precludes God from achieving (x). As for the actuality of such an inconsistency, it remains to be shown from Scripture, otherwise it is rightly “a crazy theology”. Therefore, we must emphasise that dismissing omnipotence incurs no small cost to the ontological consistency of the biblical God.

We are still left with the matter of reconciling omnipotence and omnibenevolence, considering the present evil in the world. This brings to the fore the earlier mentioned “problem of evil”, which is believed by many as the “main argument against the existence of God” (Swinburne, 2004:9). In suggesting a theodicy, it is fitting to begin by expounding omnibenevolence. The notion of omnibenevolence is important on its own, itself substantiating the existence of God. Taking omnibenevolence to mean that God is infinitely good – likely defined in terms of everlasting loving-kindness (Ps 100:5; 106:1; 136:1; 1 Chr 16:34; 2 Chr 5:13; 7:3) – it follows that He is the absolute standard of goodness (Matt 19:17). Rightly, Frame (2015:107) explains that "not one of God's attributes is strictly communicable. In that sense God's goodness is strictly his own". This Frame (2015:106) states from the perspective of goodness as "personal", opposed to the philosophical conception of goodness as "abstract". Now, it follows more naturally to conceive of goodness as personal in light of its strong connection to 'loving-kindness'. There is here a relation to McGrath's (1994:224) comments on William of Ockham's "two powers of God": "Ockham asks precisely what is meant by the word 'almighty' (*omnipotens*). It cannot, he argues, mean that God is *presently* able to do everything, rather it means that God was *once* free to act in this way. God has now established an order of things which reflects a loving and righteous divine will – and that order, once established, will remain until the end of time". Thus, there is a covenantal sense of God's omnipotence which is reflected by His omnibenevolence. One may argue that omnipotence is extrinsically limited, but not intrinsically limited – meekness is perhaps an appropriate summation.

Consigning omnibenevolence to the category "personal" bolsters the "moral argument" which itself "implies the existence of a Being that is the embodiment of the ultimate Good" (Craig, 2008:103). We may summarise the moral argument as evidencing the existence of God by the presence of objective moral values. It is this *objective* sense of moral values that Craig (2008:172) believes most convincing for the existence of God. The objective sense of right and wrong is tied to the universal inclination to believe in an objective standard of some sort. Keller (2018:16) demonstrates poignantly why this cannot derive merely from social pragmatism: "Broadly understood, faith in some view of the world and human nature informs everyone's life … All who say 'You ought to do this' or 'You shouldn't do that' reason out of such an implicit moral and religious position. Pragmatists say that we should leave our deeper worldviews behind and find consensus about 'what works' … Any picture of happy human life that 'works' is necessarily informed by deep-seated beliefs about the purpose of human life". The inherent human moralistic compulsion would on a naturalistic view be baseless without an objective end, or an absolute. Therefore, for every felt moral that is held (even collectively) as good, on the naturalist's view, there cannot follow an ought implication. Simply put, "*Is* does not imply *ought*" (Frame, 2015:99). The "is ought" distinction is a well attested philosophical concept, which ironically stems from Hume's (2017c:241) discourse on morals. Strikingly, on the naturalist's position there is no *a priori* basis for objection to evil (or supposed evil) in the world. Why, if the ultimate end of the universe is decay ought humanity to fight for, broadly, preservation, or any particular efficient paradigm in attempting preservation? Keller (2018:162-163) details this fact in terms of a “Cosmic Bench” being “empty” (adapting the despairing conclusions of the playwright *Arthur Miller*). He explains that “If the Bench is truly empty, then the whole span of human civilisation, even if it lasts a few million years, will be just an infinitesimally brief spark in relation to the oceans of dead time that preceded it and will follow it … Whether we are loving or cruel in the end would make no difference at all”. Nietzsche (2008:109) was at least consistent with the implications for morality after his supposition that “God is dead”, later rhetorising: “Isn’t it time to say of morality what Master Eckhart said: ‘I ask God to rid me of God!’” (Nietzsche, 2008:166). It is not surprising, assuming no God for the basis of morality, that Nietzsche (1897:11) wanted morality to become exposed as a “comedy”. But vastly more comical is assuming that the endeavour for “a highest mightiness and splendour” (Nietzsche, 1897:10) of humanity is a superior replacement for morality. In the laughing gulf of “dead time”, what *good* is it?

While the naturalist has greater trouble justifying the objectionability of evil than the theist has in developing a theodicy, Frame (2015:172) observes that highlighting this fact doesn’t provide the theodicy itself. Nevertheless, there are many attempted theodicies. Du Rand (2016:169-170) enumerates ten of the more popular, from the consideration of free will allowing evil, beyond the controversial expunging of certain omni-attributes, to character formation, divine point-making, a means to Christ’s human entry, and essential mystery – to name a few. Some are indeed more biblical than others. Du Rand (2016:182-183) himself concludes with the value of a multi-perspectival theodicy that centres on “becoming part of the Jesus story” while being content with a measure of mystery. However, it is the ‘Jesus story’ that points to the overarching theme of God’s justice, such that the core element of a biblical theodicy is arguably understanding the justness of God (Ps 7:11; 9:6; 140:12; Gal 6:7; cf. Job 4:8; Gen 3:15; Isa 53:4-5; Rom 3:23-26). Frame’s (2015:183) retrospective surety, motivated by the OT leading to Jesus, is an astute means of dealing with any mystery attached to a theodicy, exampling the consistent execution of God’s justice toward and upon the cross. Moreover, the recognition of time as a pivotal cog in a workable theodicy is invariable. To reference Frame’s (2015:182) consideration of time once more, truly, the mysteries in theology are linked to the mystery of time. Importantly, the crescendo of the “Jesus story” could only occur in the “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4). Could not the same be said for the time between the point of the cross and the end of history? God by his omnipotence and omnibenevolence covenants with humanity for the sustaining of the earth after the flood (Gen 9:13) (cf. Wierenga, 1983:367). Likewise, in fulfilling his promise beyond the cross, ‘slowness’ in its fulfilment should not be interpreted as impotence, but rather as omnibenevolence – the patient outworking of mercy and grace (2 Pet 3:9). Certainly, an unrestrained display of omnipotence follows the fullness of God’s longsuffering, when this present universe with its troublesome decay will be justly destroyed (2 Pet 3:10). Rightly, as Leibniz (2009:120) poeticised, "Here on earth we see apparent injustice, and we believe and even know the truth of the hidden justice of God; but we shall see that justice when at last the Sun of Justice shall show himself as he is". Let the atheistic view again be observed as it flounders to give any substance against the presence of evil – very literally offering nothing. The words of Milosz (1998) hold particular acuity in the summation of the atheistic consolation: "A true opium of the people is the belief in nothingness after death – the huge solace of thinking that for our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murders we are not going to be judged". That the latter is exceedingly unlikely outlines the contrary solace of the afflicted righteous.

2.2.3 Divine knowledge

Who knows the day of God's just judgement? None except God (Matt 24:36). This establishes the case for the divine exclusivity of certain knowledge, in turn substantiating omniscience (cf. Job 38:4; 21:22). God does not simply sustain the starry host, He names them individually, his understanding thus declared "beyond measure" (cf. Ps 147:4-5) – omniscience the fitting counterpart to omnipotence. With respect to knowledge, then, God again is necessarily absolute. In light of the latter, Nietzsche's (1897:1) quite Greek valuation of knowledge is interesting: "Our treasure is where the beehives of our knowledge are. We are ever on the road tither, as born hymenoptera and honey-gatherers of the spirit; we care at bottom but for this – to 'bring something home'". What if we conclude with Scripture that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge"? (Prov 1:7; cf. Prov 9:10; Ps 111:10) Knowledge acquired apart from God follows as hollow, lacking absolute derivation and valueless with no intrinsic meaning. If God is the source of knowledge, what good is busying oneself merely over peripheral knowledge? The biblical message calls for a shift to a centralised perspective: if knowledge is truly prized, its source must be most prized. Nietzsche's metaphorising knowledge as "spirit" in attempting to convey knowledge itself as life essence, then beckons a tragic irony compared with the biblical position: God, who is absolute spirit, is the true essence of knowledge – life springing from the knowledge of Him. The severity of dismissing God from knowledge is carried by the striking statement in Hosea: "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge" (4:6a). From the context (4:6b-7) we infer God as the source, and subject, of necessary knowledge. Thus, we move closer to an understanding of omniscience as another ontological perfection of God.

With the endeavour to expound omniscience we must reconsider that conception of God as "unembodied mind". The term "*mind"* being a matter of emphasis; it is indeed freely applied to God

(1 Sam 15:29; Ps 110:4; 1 Cor 2:16; Rom 11:34). However, it seems likely that because "unembodied mind" is used as a means of describing divine simplicity, there is a tension in describing mind as anthropomorphic. Hamori (2008:150) explains the tension succinctly: "Classical theists understand God to have a mind and a will. Some consider this in itself anthropomorphism; some might say instead that it is anthropocentric to call this anthropomorphic, and rather that we are theomorphic in having minds and wills ourselves". Undoubtedly, the concept of mind and will correlates to the metaphysical, and for that reason its precise classification as divine essence or human essence is difficult. Much less obscure, for example, is the "hand", "fingers", or "eyes" of God (Isa 66:2; Ps 8:3; 2 Chr 16:9), which by virtue of the unembodied essence of God, we can safely conclude as being anthropomorphisms. There are, however, passages where anthropomorphism, in specific contextual description of the mind of God, is clear (Jer 26:13; Exod 32:14). But since a "change of mind" conveys sentiment, it is proper to speak of these passages as anthropopathic. Maier (2004:132-133) in engaging with the various tenses of נחם (repent) contends for a biblically balanced approach: "Recognizing the accommodations in Scripture, specifically anthropomorphisms and -pathisms, one could argue that the translations that God 'repented', 'regretted', or 'changed his mind' are legitimate … Also, God's 'being sorry', or 'having regret' about something, or his 'changing his mind', must be understood within the framework of God's total knowledge, including his complete foreknowledge, and the related truth of his immutability". Ultimately, without the need to make *humanly communicable* the sentiment of God in specific situational contexts, God is "not a son of man, that he should change his mind" (Num 23:19; cf. 1 Sam15:29). The condescending immanence of God must be juxtaposed with his unsearchable transcendental thoughts that declare his unique essence. Ultimately, also, the mind of God is like no other (Isa 55:9). Regrettably, the anthropopathic passages on the mind of God have generated much theological confusion and deviation from the orthodox position of omniscience, as Venema (2016:12) and Maier (2004:133) observe of "open theism". Venema (2016:31) observes, particularly, open theism's accentuation of human free will leading to an overextended divine limitation. Venema (2016:47) concludes by summarising the unlikely reality that open theism advocates: "God is powerless to do what he wills, and must remain passively behind the wall of human freedom that he created but over which he has no lordship". It seems that open theism makes the mistake of supposing an indefinite ontological limitation of God, focused against his foreknowledge, post creation, without holding in tension the transcendental elements of God that Scripture maintains post creation. Rice (2013:34-35), a key proponent of open theism, argues that the term "limit" as it is almost unanimously used to describe the position of open theism, in scholarship for and against, is misplaced, since it invites the ontological diminution of an open theistic God. Rice (2013:36) bolsters his argument by suggesting that the difficulty of foreknowledge and human free will is a non-problem in the same way that the do-ability of illogical things is a non-problem for omnipotence – postulating individualistic futures ("future free

decisions") as un-knowable, thereby exempting it from omniscience. However, once it is noted from Scripture the direct testimony of the knowability of the future by God (Isa 46:10), proposing the unknowability of individualistic futures is not well grounded (cf. Prov 19:21). In light of Scripture, the impression follows that open theism is insufficiently balanced, and regardless of the sanctioning of the word "limit", its meaning is inevitably applied to God. Moreover, Rice's (2013:36) suggestion that "If future free decisions do not become real, or do not exist, until they occur, there is no need to explain how God could know them", fails to correlate well with a universe created *ex nihilo*, with God referencing only Himself. In line with the latter point, the case against open theism mounts by means of a fuller, ontologically consistent definition of omniscience. Consider Craig's (2008:174) definition of omniscience: "the property of knowing only and all truths", "It's impossible to know any more truths than that", he qualifies. This is certainly more nuanced than defining omniscience as "knowing all things". In any event, cognisance of what is included in the set "all" is important; here the implication of "all" is the inclusion of God Himself. This is important because if God's ontology is defined as infinite, then in knowing Himself, He must know infinitely – not merely all created truths and potentialities. This is plain in orthodox circles: "Yea, so infinite is his knowledge, that nothing is hid from it, no, not the deep things of God" (Guyse, 1721:32). Or as Charnock (1840:266) explicates: "The understanding of God and the nature of God are both infinite and so equal to one another: his understanding is equal to himself; he understands himself so well, that nothing can be known by him more perfectly than himself is known to himself". Succinctly, "Only the Infinite can know the infinite" (Tozer, 1961:57). In passing; how is the mysterious interplay between human will and divine will explained? So far as it concerns omniscience, perhaps it may help to proffer the perspective of omniscience as infinite *wisdom*, as opposed to mere knowledge categorised statically according to past, present, future, and potential (as much as this may be a facet). While this mystery is likely irreducible, divine wisdom as it reflects a complex dynamic of will and knowledge with infinite bounds, may therein accommodate human will, to whatever extent it is free, without any limitation to divine knowledge and will (cf. Dan 2:21-23; Phil 2:13).

Open theism relates in part to a philosophical objection against omniscience, albeit that the latter familiarly emphasises the proposal of logical inconsistencies between divine attributes. Metcalf (2004:298-306) seeks to draw out contradiction between simultaneous omnipotence and omniscience by presenting learning as a logically possible task within omnipotence and the inability of an omniscient being to learn. Metcalf (2004:300) highlights Mawson's view that God choosing to do evil fails to denote weakness because God's doing evil would be an "unreasonable action". Metcalf (2004:300) continues by supposing that this does not apply to learning, since learning is not an "unreasonable action". This presupposes inherent reasonability in learning, but learning is likely only contingently reasonable. Notably, the reduction of ignorance after learning is what is "reasonable" or good. This emphasises learning as a means to an end; learning is only reasonable in so far as enlightenment results. Now, open theism effectively affirms that God learns in relation to the actualisation of human free will, avoiding Metcalf's philosophical objection to some extent, but sacrificing divine ontological consistency. Even though learning is deemed a reasonable task, it is only reasonable within finite context. Both the philosophical objection and open theism fail to consider the absolute nature of God as self-referentially infinite. Learning is "unreasonable" in the context of omniscience. If all knowledge is had, learning becomes self-contradictory, and therefore a non-task which demands nothing of omnipotence. In other words, if God knows He is omniscient He will not employ his omnipotence in learning. In the context of the infinite, learning is a metaphysical absurdity. The philosophical objection to omniscience is, therefore, answerable with the same sentiment used in defending the simultaneity of omnipotence and omnibenevolence. This much is clear from the exploration of the logical dynamics of God's omni-essence; it is impossible for God to err.

2.3 Humanity as *imago Dei*

Nietzsche (1897:1) believes that "we are strangers to ourselves, we perceivers – we ourselves to ourselves". However, the fear of the LORD as the beginning of knowledge provides the biblical basis for a solution to Nietzsche's anthropic self-alienation. It is only with respect to God that humanity can know itself. The biblical presupposition concerning humanity, as made in the image of God (Gen 1:26) is, therefore, a fundamentally important consideration. Troublingly, apart from *imago Dei* matter-of-factly ascribed to humanity, there is nothing substantive in Scripture directly defining the *imago Dei*. Scant scriptural detail (Gen 1:26-27; cf. 5:1-2; 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; cf. Jas 3:9) aside, if the terms "unsearchable" and "mysterious" pertain to God, it follows that what constitutes his image is in some sense also mysterious. And the diversified endeavour of scholarship to define the *imago* reflects its somewhat inscrutable nature. The above consideration of "mind" and the indecision over the appropriate category, either human or divine, is one such example. The latter pertains to the "structural" or "substantialist" interpretation (one of three main interpretive branches) of the *imago Dei*, which seeks a definition in terms of unique makeup. Augustine (2012:350) exampled this thinking, and in relation to the mind: "… we must find in the soul of man, i.e. the rational or intellectual soul, that image of the Creator which is immortally implanted in its immortality". Calvin (2010:93, 95), believing that the *imago* must have a "firmer basis" than the "subtleties" of a triune composition, contends for the "mind and heart" as the "seat" of the *imago*. Now, we must note that the embodied state of humanity and its multifaceted contingent existence reflects human complexity, as opposed to divine simplicity, making structural interpretations difficult. Calvin (2010:93-95) himself is somewhat non-committal, with his acknowledgement of various facets of the *imago*, such that scholarship attributes differing conclusions to his conception of the *imago*. Vorster (2014) notes a substantialistic dualism between soul and body as Calvin's interpretation, while Simango (2016) notes "moral likeness to God" as Calvin's interpretation. Middleton (2005:18-19) observes relative to the substantialistic interpretation that "Most patristic, medieval, and modern interpreters typically asked not an exegetical, but a speculative, question: In what way are humans *like* God and *unlike* animals?" There is something of a poetic truth in noting the otherness of humanity compared with animality, as it mirrors the reality of God's otherness, although, such is a very arcane likeness. Granted, speculative questions are in some sense inevitable given the little explicit biblical data.

What then of the main alternative interpretations "relationalist", and "functionalist"? Is the *imago* defined in terms of specific relationship (divine-human and human-human), or divine-human delegated function, such as dominion? Middleton (2005:235-236; 293) advocates a more functionalist interpretation ("royal-functional") that appears to give way to a relational note. Middleton (2005:25-26) formulates his view with an exegetical reading of Genesis 1:26-27 within the context of Genesis 1:1-2:3, endeavouring faithfulness to the biblical text. His conclusion follows: "In the end, the liberating character of the *imago Dei* is grounded in the nature of God, who calls the world into being as an act of generosity" (Middleton, 2005:297). But it is precisely such a grounding that makes the *imago* so very profound and ultimately mysterious. Calvin's (2010:94) view on a functional, dominion-centred, interpretation of the *imago* is affirmable: "This truly is some portion, though very small, of the image of God". Barth (2004a:117) advocated a relational interpretation of the *imago*, but he likewise established the point of essential mystery, comprehensively: "We can describe individual men and women by their Christian names and surnames, their date of birth, family, birthplace or titles. But we have to realise that when we say all this we merely point to something which cannot be expressed, to the mystery in which man stands revealed to God and to Him alone" (Barth, 1962:199). Barth's (1962:200-202) emphasis on the importance of the masculine and feminine nuances as they unify within the *imago* is noted (cf. Gen 1:27b). But particularly, the "specific differentiation" of male and female remains mysterious apart from "divine command" (Barth, 1962:202-203). The mooring provided by divine nature as essential even in human community, is a possible summary of Barth's position.

With the element of mystery pervasive in most-all interpretations, Craigo-Snell's (2016) argument for movement away from "essentialist" (relative to substantialist) and "constructivist" (relative to relationalist and functionalist) interpretations toward some combination, is understandable. The question is asked, "Perhaps the core of humanity is to love?", continuing, "Then those with detachment disorder, autism, or just plain loneliness do not quite meet the standards for full inclusion" (Craigo-Snell, 2016:25). Similarly, with reference to the Enlightenment thinkers and the postulation of human essence as cognition, Craigo-Snell (2016:24) highlights the implied exclusion of those who are cognitively impaired. With some appreciation for constructivist interpretations, Craigo-Snell (2016:26) holds the tension that "We really are – here and now – all the same and all in this together. We really are – in ways wonderful and strange – wildly different from one another". Considering the essential mystery of the *imago* as "rooted in the mystery of God", Craigo-Snell (2016:29-30) proposes a limited apophatic anthropology, much as apophatic theology uses appropriately mystic language when pondering the depths of God. This is reminiscent of Saward (1974:222) who argues that "in so far as theology as a whole can be spoken of as apophatic, then theological anthropology also shares this characteristic". Craigo-Snell's (2016) position is affirmable as far as it pays respect to the reality that humanity bears the image of an *infinite* God.

Concerning apophaticism in general, there is some controversy, and a balance is required. Identifying Alvin Plantinga as opponent, Lebens (2014:272) attempts to develop a "Plantinga-proof" apophaticism, and offers an acceptable balance: "Utterances of 'God is good', 'God is powerful', 'God took the Children of Israel out of Egypt' mean just what their utterers intend by them. But … anyone claiming to have experienced God in his transcendence feels compelled to add to their descriptions of God the paradoxical claim that he is beyond description". Furthermore, Lebens (2014:274) foreseeing possible accusation of giving a "neutered" apophaticism, rightly argues that even so it "doesn't entail any major revision of our religious language". So long as a distinction is made between humankind's limited being and God's limitless being, and those distinct aspects that Scripture does lucidly declare of humankind and God are maintained, we may achieve a healthy tension. Broad interpretations of the *imago Dei*, as they recognise essential mystery in humanity are likewise affirmable. Piper (1971) examples the latter well: "Our definition of the *imago Dei* must be broad because the only sure statements we have about the *imago* are broad. The definition I offer is this: *The imago Dei is that in man which constitutes him as he-whom-God-loves*". The proverbial thread of mystery that connects all elements of the *imago* is, therefore, unavoidable and appropriate due to its consistency with the nature of God. Importantly, while the fullness of the *imago* is something mysterious, it does not follow that the *imago* is purely allegorical, or less than actual. From a scriptural standpoint the disclosure of humanity as the image of God is essential to humanity's self-knowledge yet, paradoxically, the knowledge of the full constitution of the *imago* is not detrimental. We may get closer to understanding this paradox by noting what being in the image of God means by implication. The knowledge of being the *imago Dei* facilitates the awareness of special divine interest on the human, which in turn has profound implications for how humanity purposes itself, derives meaning, and functions. Should we not expect that God would be more directly involved, and call to account, if He has gone as far as investing his image in a created being?

Where matters become problematic is the accentuation of the mystery of the *imago* resultant of the fall of humanity (Fall) (Gen 3). Craigo-Snell (2016) makes no mention of the important aspect of the Fall as it concerns the *imago*. Calvin (2010:95) believes that those post Fall "obscure lineaments" of the *imago* are so obscure that the *imago* may well be destroyed in fallen humanity. There is consensus that Calvin means "the image is totally, absolutely lost in the Fall" (Engel, 2002:56). It is possible that Calvin's extreme position was partly motivated by the belief that there is no difference between humanity as the image of God, and humanity as the likeness of God (Calvin, 2010:93-94), as opposed to Augustine (1873:411) who held distinction between the two (cf. Gen 1:26). Technicalities aside, if Piper's (1971) definition is correct, substantiated in conjunction with the post Fall expression of God's steadfast love toward humanity (Deut 7:9; Ps 86:15; Zph 3:17; John 3:16), Calvin's extreme view is questionable. And supposing the *imago* (and/or likeness) is at least "fractured" post Fall, such would accentuate its mysterious nature, making it difficult to be sure of exactly all that is lost. Importantly, as Augustine (1873:411, 427) and Irenaeus (Shoham, 2010:149) recognised, if essential distinction is maintained between humanity as creature and God as Creator, then likeness, whether it is fractured or whole, is still limited. But '*imago*' conveys limitation also, just as the reflection of an object is not the fullness of that object; whereupon Calvin is logically justified in believing no distinction between *imago* and likeness. However, while the fracturing of the *imago* post Fall assuredly means humanity becomes *less* like God, and *less* His image, that needn't mean its loss. Otherwise stated, the *imago* is no longer resolute in humanity, but the constituents of the *imago* needn't be lost. Anecdotally, if the *imago* could be entirely lost, the dire context prior to the Noahic deluge, is likely the closest humanity came; with the thoughts of humanity's heart "only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). Such does indicate worsening dissent apart from divine intervention; the *imago* suffering from a sort of perpetual fracturing with increasing separation from God. Notably, if one believes in any marring of the *imago* post Fall, one cannot then simply dismiss substantialistic interpretations of the *imago* by highlighting capacity deficits (say of cognition) in select human groups. Even if cognition only partly constitutes the *imago*, it is susceptible to fracturing post Fall. Augustine (1873:350) accommodates this to a degree: "although reason or intellect is at one time torpid in [the soul], at another it appears small, and at another great, yet the human soul is never anything save rational or intellectual … whether this image be so worn out as to be almost none at all, or whether it be obscure and defaced, or bright and beautiful, certainly it always is". It is wise not to conclude that the fractured *imago* is fractured the same across the spectrum of humanity. However, with the full nature of the *imago* as credibly mysterious, it is one-dimensional to conclude that the fractured *imago* is variously fractured *only* within cognitive capacity. As to the range of the fracture across all that constitutes the *imago*, Vorster (2011:16) explains rightly: “The fact that human image-bearing cannot be destroyed by sin, does not mean that sin only affects the human partially”. Lemke (2008:11) conveys the persistence of the fallen *imago* by noting convictional function: “Clearly, the originally created image of God remains intact to some degree even after the Fall. Being a sinner does not necessitate that humans have lost the image of God; in fact, being able to sin presupposes the image of God”. However, if the post Fall *imago* is fractured it can only imperfectly instruct human conscience (cf. Jer 17:9).

Now, there are those who believe that the *imago* is entirely intact post Fall. Barth (2010a:198) was clearly a proponent, using the scant biblical description of the *imago* to motivate his view: “We cannot deduce from this [OT data] that man has lost it [likeness] through the fall, either partially or completely, formally or materially”. But, certainly, the entrance of sin into the world and death thereby (Gen 3:14-19; Rom 5:12), is a pronouncement of ontological consequence in contrast to humanity’s pre-fallen state. Can we rightly say that humanity lost no composure of the *imago* after the introduction of death? What does sin corrupt in humanity if not the *imago*? If we answer with any of humanity’s attributes, relational standing, or functional role, the assumption is made that those things are excluded from the *imago*. Such an assumption seems more speculative than simply proposing the *imago* as fractured. Nevertheless, this study echoes Augustine’s (1873:350) affirmation that the *imago* “always is”. Therefore, whether the *imago* is fractured or intact, the fact that it remains affirms the unique, likely measureless, value of humanity. As Vorster (2011:16) writes, “Even after the Fall humans remain an *opus et creatura Dei*”. Specifically, humanity remains the crowning glory of creation (Ps 8:3-8), and as such is the object most valued of God, of which He is most mindful (Matt 10:29-31).

2.3.1 The attempted identification of God

If fallen humanity bears the fractured image of God, fractured human capacities in turn, as though a fractured lens, potentially distort the identification of God. Much as a fractured lens would induce a confusing kaleidoscope of imagery – each fractured segment conveying a partial truth of the whole matter. At the very least, detail is lost. Moreover, through such a lens fallen humanity beholds itself, and just as perspective of the Source is distorted, a distorted sense of self follows. Biblically, there is a sense in which this distortion is self-imposed (Rom 1:18-20) by spiting a certain God-given clarity for the essential knowledge of Him. As Romans 1 implies, spiting the general knowledge of God certainly precludes obtaining a special, or detailed, knowledge of God. And spiting the conscience which by God's grace persists in fallen humanity, results in deepening darkness (Rom 1:28-32). Here again is the sense of the perpetually fracturing *imago*. Assuming the cognitive capacity to perceive God in creation is ample, the post Fall heart, wicked beyond understanding (Jer 17:9), compels distortion. Surely this does affirm the complexity of humanity, but also that the *imago* is fractured in the deepest sense, and in the interplay between heart and mind as respective capacities (cf. Luke 10:27).

It appears idolatry is at the heart of all distortion (Rom 1:25); the age-old predilection of setting up the created as though it were the Creator (Exod 32:5, 8). Paganism: that is the name of what we are describing. We are addressing what encompasses the broadest spectrum of faith practices outside of monotheism. For this reason, a pagan is primarily defined as "A person holding religious beliefs other than those of the main world religions" (English Oxford living dictionaries, 2018). Another definition emphasises the polytheistic nature of paganism; its vast range underscored by the inclusion of *irreligiousness*, expressed in hedonism, as another defining factor (Merriam Webster, 2018a). What does paganism communicate of the fallen human condition? It is the following. Wicked though the fallen heart is it longs to worship, proving itself wicked by longing to worship anything but God. Does a sense truly remain for that to which God calls humanity – that objective moral framework derived from an absolute authority? Variously, it is demonstrably so, as antiquity affirms all the more (Linsley, 2010). Cook (2015:940) draws on Leibniz' recognition of the similarities between the rationally derived conception of Sovereignty and morality in Chinese paganism and the more revelatory Judeo-Christian conception of Sovereignty and morality. Cook (2015:942-943) wishes to example Leibniz' essential agreement that rationally derived truth is ultimately paramount. However, there are scriptural nuances in opposition to the rationalism of Leibniz. It is in light of the affirmed universal accessibility of revelation and the need to account for the *heart* that rationalism falls short. There are three points that demonstrate the shortcoming. Firstly, the historical recognition of the need for a sovereign God and an appropriately derived morality, as exampled in Chinese paganism, should not be surprising – such is congruent with the general revelation explained in Romans 1. Secondly, extending from the first point, it is evident that the recognition of God, which Romans 1 attests is universally possible, is not exclusive to the domain of reason: "We must admit … that *among them* presupposes *in them*, or the existence of a knowledge of God in their hearts" (Lange *et al.*, 2008a:82) (Rom 1:19, cf. Rom 2:14-15). Thirdly, we must emphasise the recorded superficiality of Israel in worshipping God as sovereign, and the breakdown of corresponding morality (Deut 9:12; Isa 29:13; Amos 2:4). The last point establishes the idea that the fallen heart ultimately idolises itself (Ps 10:3; Rom 1:30), such that even if idolatry is not explicitly present, it is inherently present. Similarly, the prolific Chinese pagan, Confucius, has been identified as inconsistent with his inkling of God: “Occasionally, [Confucius] betrays an undefined feeling of a Supreme Being, which, nevertheless, never penetrates the pagan darkness of his mind” (Gützlaff, 2015:436). Furthermore, there is indication that even with special revelation, both mind and heart must be engaged towards change, wherewith a deeper knowing of revealed truth is had (cf. Jer 31:33). Once more, it is unlikely that humanity’s essence is simply rational capacity. If indeed it is not, rationalism represents an oversimplification of human interaction with revealed truth, unable to lead to effectual application.

2.3.2 Materialistic presuppositions

It is proper to consider the alternative to theistic conceptions of human origin and ontology, in doing so we must focus in on materialism[10] and naturalism. We have mentioned that naturalism lacks grounding for morality when compared with a divine ontology that is biblically defined. Here we can better validate the latter notion by exploring the presuppositions and implications of naturalism. It is best to expound by way of materialism. Materialism; the belief that all that exists is matter, is expanded scientifically by naturalistic paradigms of existence. These naturalistic paradigms in turn majoritively presuppose materialism, or the physicality of reality, nevertheless ironically remaining metaphysically grounded (Moser & Yandell, 2001:4). The irony is more appreciable when contenders for the naturalistic position explain as follows: “Many people have been raised to accept unquestioningly certain principles, one of which is that life originated by means of a God or gods. The theological or philosophical idea that life resulted from such a *super*natural process is a *belief* … we have no known way to test experimentally the idea that divine intervention created life” (Chaisson, 2005:254). However, for the naturalistic world view, belief is no less pre-requisite, since some metaphysical notion of the *origin* of the sequential set of cause and effect characterising the physical universe is inevitably invoked. As the latter world view framework attempts specificity, it invokes evolution[11] as its explanatory cornerstone, but without any foundation of a legitimately irreducible material origin. Consider, for example, Darwinian theory. Biological diversity is explained by gradual change in the progression of organisms from lower life forms to higher life forms through selective heredity (Darwin, 2001:13, 431). However, we must emphasise that at best this provides an explanation of a mechanism leading to biological variety rather than an explanation of the origin of the first biological set itself. McGrath (2015:115) points out that Darwin

[10] We address specifically ontic materialism and naturalism and their respective interdependence. Even empiricism, as developed by Bacon and Locke, has been noted to rely on materialism, with the historical overlaps outweighing the controversy in suggesting relation (Kearney, 2017:109).

[11] Here referring to the various categories of the theory (cosmic, chemical, and biological) that attempt to explain absolute origin from a macro-evolutionary perspective.

himself was not fashioning a replacement for God by his theory (cf. Darwin, 2001:154), and that even so “some might argue that Darwin may have made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist” (cf. Dawkins, 1996:6). There is something subtler involved. Those who believe Darwin bolstered atheism seem to falsely extrapolate materialism as the presupposition of Darwinian theory, attempting to make materialism intellectually credible towards justifying belief that God does not exist. Evolution, with its contemporary expressions, certainly presupposes materialism, but it simultaneously demonstrates that the bearing of materialism is a *reductio ad absurdum*. The fantastical notion that the blind convalescence of matter and time could result in such a by-product as humanity fails to withstand inquiry about how those respective constituents originated. Here we revisit the intrinsic problem of seeking an absolute in what is finite. The problem remains, only now contemporary evolutionary paradigms highlight the fact that the scientific naturalist is stuck in reductionism attempting to find the ‘simple’ material point which caused the complex universe. This reductionism requires an infinite application, which is untenable. The perpetual reductionism can only be terminated by positing another contradictory: self-causation, as per Hawking and Mlodinow (2010:180). Yet another, as though an elaboration of Hawking and Mlodinow: conceding that the finite reduces to nothing, but supposing that nothing is really something, as per Krauss (2012:170). The naturalist undermines himself if he depends on self-contradiction to explain why God is unnecessary. Indeed, these contemporary postulations are not very much beyond what Hume proposes (2017a:39). We may also criticise the supposed scientific displacement of God against the humbler assessment of the agnostic scientist, Berlinski (2009), who presents the following pertinent inquiries, answering briefly and emphatically:

> Has anyone provided a proof of God’s inexistence? Not even close.
>
> Has quantum cosmology explained the emergence of the universe or why it is here? Not even close.
>
> Have the sciences explained why our universe seems to be fine-tuned to allow for the existence of life? Not even close.
>
> Are physicists and biologists willing to believe in anything so long as it is not religious thought? Close enough.
>
> Has rationalism in moral thought provided us with an understanding of what is good, what is right, and what is moral? Not close enough.
>
> Has secularism in the terrible twentieth century been a force for good? Not even close to being close.

> Is there a narrow and oppressive orthodoxy of thought and opinion within the sciences? Close enough.
>
> Does anything in the sciences or in their philosophy justify the claim that religious belief is irrational? Not even ballpark.
>
> Is scientific atheism a frivolous exercise in intellectual contempt? Dead on.

What we appear to have in naturalism is that sub-defining factor of paganism: irreligiousness. It is a sophisticated paganism, which presumptuously asserts that what is created is also the Creator. Indeed, naturalism, by the sophistication it employs, seeks to assert absolute autonomy. The notion of a self-caused universe implies a self-caused humanity. Following the absurdity, the deeper inference is the attempt at being one's own god. The sophistication is bankrupted by the absurdity, and naturalism is paradoxically exposed as a false religion. Alas, it is merely paganism.

In digression, it should be said that there is something akin to a middle ground in the form of theistic evolution (or evolutionary creationism). Middleton (2018), for one, sees no conflict, and he is joined by others who view evolutionary science as an explanatory tool for a multi-faceted constitution of the *imago* (Fergusson, 2013:440). Granted, this evolutionary conception at least has a foundation. As a natural theology it infers divine wisdom in dynamic structures and mechanisms, particularising them as an evolution. There are those who disagree with this middle ground. The highly credentialed Sanford (2005:vi), for example, demonstrates the *devolution* of the human genome, exposing the evolutionary paradigm of mutation and natural selection, its "Primary Axiom" and "'sacred cow'", as "indefensible". Others, Meyer *et al.* (2017:257), question the theist's dependence on evolutionary hypotheses given certain demonstrable limitations in explanatory power. Meanwhile, Lennox (2015) provides helpful terminology when he describes the creation of humanity as a "singularity", one of a number, reinforcing the perspective of humanity as a miraculous happening. He continues against the "naturalistic presupposition" that there is a "complete uniformity of explanation from the simple to the complex".

Back to naturalism. What does it boil down to for humanity? The logical implication of humanity having come from nothing, absurd as it is to entertain, is that humanity is ultimately *worth* nothing. All human endeavour follows as worthless. If humanity traces its very substance to nothing, or even to an infinitesimal "something", how should the more abstract moral framework be regarded as having any gravity? Mutual fair treatment, chiefly love, is then anchored in nothing. At bottom what we have is a self-contradiction that discredits what is deeply human. If adopted, eventually one lives the self-contradiction as one truly double-minded. Nietzsche (1897:216) observes the essence of the matter: "Is not just the self-diminution of man, is not his *will* to self-diminution ever since Copernicus making irresistible progress? Alas, the belief in his dignity, his uniqueness, his irreplaceability in the rank-sequence of beings is gone; he has become an *animal*, an animal without likeness, allowance, and reserve, – he, who in his former belief was almost a God". That this trajectory represents an uncovering of true human nature is not so. Nevertheless, Nietzsche was truly beholding human decent into madness akin to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:33), albeit now volitional. Such is the trajectory of the fractured *imago*. But all will come to know, as Solomon, that the material in and of itself is meaningless, worthless (Eccl. 1:1-11). In the end it is fitting to declare that God makes infinite difference. To God alone belongs infinite substance, but humanity, his image, derives from Him, infinite worth. Furthermore, much as for Nebuchadnezzar there was a pronouncement of restoration (Dan 4:25-26), it is the Word of God that arrests the decent of humanity with a promise of restoration (cf. Gen 3:15; Jer 24:7).

2.4 The role of revelation

Maintaining the essential ontological category distinctions above, humanity as finite and divinity as infinite, we concur with Erickson (2001:42): "Because humankind is finite and God is infinite, we cannot know God unless he reveals himself to us, that is, unless he reveals himself to humans in such a way that they can know and fellowship with him". Divine revelation epitomises divine condescension in making certain realities humanly communicable. Therefore, revelation, both general and special, is a matter of *defining* significance for the nature of God, and humanity as derived from Him. General revelation provides enough to caution against arbitrariness, but special revelation justifies that caution by specifying such pillars of reality as origin, ontology, corruption, resolution, meaning, and purpose. Special revelation, the Word of God, embodied by Scripture, is of principal interest, since by it we move away from abstractions to something more substantive. Up to now we have weaved Scripture throughout this chapter, testing philosophical abstractions with Scripture in mind. In the process of drawing from what Scripture presents, the applicability, cohesivity, and consistency of Scripture begins to emerge. The latter testifies to the *reasonability* of Scripture. This reasonability calls into question the deistic notion that one need only depend on reasoning using the natural world, with Scripture relegated to the superstitious and superfluous (cf. Voltaire, 2011:104). We may comment on the deistic bent of Hume's *Dialogues*, exampling the lack of scriptural grounding that would otherwise bring reasonable distinction. If God is infinite, to say that He is incomprehensible is consistent with the limitations of finitude, and therefore reasonable. But because of revelation, an orthodox position cannot maintain that God is "*absolutely* incomprehensible” (Hume, 2017a:9; 53); much less given Scripture, where in addition to a revealed personhood (Exod. 3:14), the divine will for relationship is clear, to the extent of detailed, comprehensible, historical involvement (Exod. 6:7). Neither is the “total infirmity of reason” (Hume, 2017a:53) an orthodox position (cf. Rom 1:20). Indeed, to “encourage mankind in its blind bewilderment, its lack of confidence, its gloom” does “promote superstition” (Hume, 2017a:53), but it is a deistic superstition. The attack has no bearing on orthodox faith which is informed with an invitation to reason, and felt alleviation of conscience: “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isa. 1:18).

2.4.1 Circularity and divine self-disclosure

Frame (2015:10) highlights the uniqueness of Scripture towards validating the biblical presupposition of God, explaining that “Biblical religion is unique in its appeal to history as the locus of divine revelation”. Frame (2015:39) explains, furthermore, that “…on the crucial question whether the universe is governed by a person or by impersonal principles, Christianity is unique. It is consistently personalistic, and all its rivals are in the opposite camp”. The consistency of the personalistic nature of God should be emphasised. Now, if one objects, observing circularity (proving the substance of God by His Word), Frame (2015:11) rightly observes that “when one is arguing for an ultimate criterion, whether Scripture, the Qur’an, human reason, sensation, or whatever, one must use criteria compatible with that conclusion. If that is circularity, then everybody is guilty of circularity”. Justifying the position on Scripture by means of evidences (historical and textual), Frame (2015:15) suggests is part of a “broad” circular argument. The need for an “ultimate criterion” such as Scripture for an understanding of God gains further merit given consensus on the limitation of inference from creation, or natural theology, to establish theism (Wood, 2014:62). Pohlmann (2015:6) succinctly summarises the sentiment of Barth’s preference for “perfections” over “attributes” in description of God: “It is possible for us to ‘attribute’ to God who we think He is, whereas ‘perfections’ denotes that we can only know God by revelation”. We are back to the reality of the divine infinite. If we are dealing with an infinite God, the inevitable inquiry is what witnesses most cohesively, and consistently within the given contexts to the fact. We must take seriously the claim of Scripture as the very Word of this infinite God (2 Tim 3:16-17); if it is so, there is nothing else that correlates closely enough to his infinite essence. What then is a more reliable standard? Maintaining that the infinite must in some way condescend, Scripture mounts as a most logical presupposition on several fronts. Indeed, the unfolding biblical tapestry as it communicates the richness of the nature of God throughout the multiplicity of contexts is a marvel.

Scripture reveals how much more God is than an outside agent, and how much more tangible than a concept; how real, personal, relational, and yet other.

2.4.2 Expanding the divine name

We engaged the tetragrammaton and 'I AM' motif of Exodus (3, 6) as it connects to existence; testifying to God as Source, uncaused and un-contingent, existence itself his attribute. With the disclosure of this most profound name of God we arrive at the essence of necessary self-disclosure. But as though rippling throughout history, from '*Yahweh*' follows successive revelation of the divine nature by additional names that convey intent for a specific relationship with humanity. We are given a multi-perspectival view of the immeasurable loftiness of God by such names as *Yahweh-Sabbaoth*, the LORD of Hosts (Isa. 22:14); *El-Elyon*, God most high (Gen 14:18); *El-Deah*, God who knows (1 Sam. 2:2-3); *Attiyq Youm*, Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9); *El-Olam*, God eternal (Gen 21:33). And as if to assert that no loftiness could prevent His reach, He is *Yahweh-Shammah*, the LORD present (Jer 23:23-24). And while present, *Yahweh-Maccaddeshem*, our Sanctifier (Exod. 31:13); *Yahweh-Rapha*, our Healer (Exod 15:26); *Yahweh-Rohi*, our Shepherd (Ps 23:1). God is *Yahweh-Jireh*, our Provider (Gen 22:14). His provision is eternally exemplified in that He is *Yahweh-Tsidkenu*, our Righteousness (Jer 23:6); *Yahweh-Ghmolah*, our Recompense (Jer 51:56); *Yahweh-Nissi*, our Banner (Exod. 17:15); *Yahweh-Shalom*, our Peace (Judg 6:24). Assuredly, by every name God is the absolute expression of its meaning. By the revelation of the names of God through history, the faithfulness of God to the expression of his own nature is abundantly manifest (Ps 9:10).

2.4.2.1 The pronoun "he"

We have predefined God in the flow of description with the masculine pronoun. Why does it follow that after "I AM" (x), "He is" (x) is interchangeable? Grammatically, "He" is consistent with Scripture's assigning the masculine הוא and αὐτός (he, him, it) to God (Gen 1:27; John 12:50). The masculine pronoun aligns with the masculine gender of the divine names; the masculine "*Yahweh*" prefixed to additional expressions. The masculine gender is also assigned to the more generic names of God (Elohim, Adonai, Shaddai, Theos, Kurios). Predominant divine roles are also overtly masculine (Father, King, Husband) (John 12:49; Ps 10:16; Isa 54:5). Furthermore, consistency with the personalistic portrayal of God renders the neutral "it" largely inappropriate. However, consistency with the otherness of God inclines toward neutrality. Spirit is an example of this neutrality. If it is conceded that gender is a physical attribute, gender is not appropriately assigned to spirit (cf. Mark 12:25), personhood nevertheless withstanding. This tension is exampled in the name אֶהְיֶה, 'I AM' (Exod 3:14), masculine, yet the name as a statement communicates that God is utterly unique, and nevertheless a personal being. The masculinity is unavoidable in the personal name of God; the "to be" root היה, if we entertain its use in יהוה, "*Yahweh*" (Exod 3:15), is masculinised. Given the tension, it is plain that relating to physically defined personalistic roles is integral to the condescension of God. Authority and might are more readily assigned to masculinity, especially in ancient contexts, whereas nurturing is more readily assigned to femininity. And God does depict Himself in the feminine role (Isa 66:13; Luke 13:34). The tension is maintained by acknowledging that no single role can encapsulate his being.

Furthermore, it is fundamental to acknowledge masculinity as objectively distinct from femininity if this distinction is inspired of God. Lewis (2001d:238) called this distinction the "opaque element" in his context, he continued: "If we abandon that, if we retain only what can be justified by standards of prudence and convenience at the bar of enlightened common sense, then we exchange revelation for that old wraith Natural Religion". And so far as God has chosen to predominantly reveal Himself using masculine imagery, we should heed it as a necessary communication with definite meaning. It is the contention of positions that affirm the divine inspiration of Scripture that the gender with which God reveals Himself should not be made abstract or loose, failing which important context is lost. Lewis (2001d:237) wrote poignantly on this matter also: "Christians think that God Himself has taught us how to speak of Him. To say that it does not matter is to say either that all the masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential. And this is surely intolerable".

2.4.3 The Trinity

If there is a scriptural doctrine that most stupefies reason, it is the trinitarian nature of God. Through the narrative of Scripture God is not only revealed as personal, but tri-personal and one God. The astonishing implication is that God is relational in Himself: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit in perfect union. Although the word "Trinity" is not expressly employed in description of God, it is certainly implied in Scripture (Isa 9:6; Luke 1:35; Matt 28:19; 1 Pet 1:1-2; Eph 4:4-6). Indeed, "the LORD our God, the LORD is One" (Deut 6:4), nevertheless "the LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand…" (Ps 110:1). There is not a better way to approach the manner in which God is triune than to concede that it involves another dimension. And starting from that humble vantage appreciate that it cannot be fully grasped. This dimensional engagement echoes

Lewis' (2001b:162) conception once more. Now, what can seem from the human dimension a contradiction does not sit well with some, as Tozer (1961:17) accounts with dissent:

> Some persons who reject all they cannot explain have denied that God is a Trinity. Subjecting the Most High to their cold, level-eyed scrutiny, they conclude that it is impossible that He could be both One and Three. These forget that their whole life is enshrouded in mystery. They fail to consider that any real explanation of even the simplest phenomenon in nature lies hidden in obscurity and can no more be explained than can the mystery of the Godhead.

The extent of the unknown is not overstated by Tozer, even in the contemporary context. Lennox (2011a:160) concurs by means of the Second Person of the Trinity: "If the cleverest scientists do not fully understand things like energy, light and gravity, how could anyone ever hope to fathom [the] most profound of all events in the history of the universe – the crucifixion of God incarnate?" Those who may presume to encapsulate God with any particular logical conception, and judge Him accordingly, may as though a modern Job be humbled by interrogation turned on them (cf. Job 38:3). God could conceivably inquire of the contemporary person, "Where were you when I created energy? Tell me what it is" (cf. Job 38:4). Infinitely falling short, any person, at fully comprehending the inner being of energy's source. Is it any wonder that those who tried to summarise the Trinity contrived heresies?[12] Considering the above, it is best to keep description of the Trinity limited, appreciating the mystery as Scripture presents it.

2.4.4 The Logos

With the Second Person of the Trinity we appropriately reach the crescendo of the dialogue on divine and human nature: The Logos, Word, Son of God, Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ; who was in the beginning with God, God Himself, made human (John 1:1-2, 14; cf. Isa. 55:10-11). However, true to the mystery of what is being described, Card (2014:38) explains that "More words have been spent defining *Word* than any other word". Jamieson *et al.* (1997:127) offer an insightful formulation: The Word is "He *who is to God what man's word is to himself, the manifestation or expression of himself to those without him*". Beyond contextualising the divinity of Jesus in his prologue, John's use of the term Λόγος (Logos) has an important historical connection. Historically, "Logos" denoted a more abstract "reason" for existence, and if put in

[12] Modalism, perhaps the most prominent example, asserting that God is really one with three modes.

contemporary terms is akin to the "M-theory"[13] of the universe, or Hawking and Mlodinow's (2010:180) notion of the law of gravity as causative of the universe. The improvised Hellenistic-Jewish "Logos" of the first century philosopher, Philo, Lange and Schaff (2008:51) observe as having persistent Gnostic traits when compared with the Logos John communicated, "who is distinguished from that mixed figment of Old Testament theology and Greek speculation". Indeed, John communicates the definitive intersection of humanity and divinity, the two natures becoming one in the person of Jesus of Nazareth – the hypostatic union.

The Logos that John communicates undeniably affirms the *imago Dei*, and the measureless value of humanity, all the while making particularly vivid the relational nature of God. Through Jesus, God is most clearly revealed (John 1:18, 14:9), and by Jesus' perfection there is clarity for what humanity is intended to be (John 13:12-15). There is yet more to Jesus'' marvellous depth. Through Jesus all that constitutes natural revelation was made (John 1:3). And Jesus is the embodiment of special revelation (John 5:39), and the One to whom all Scripture points (Luke 24:27). Furthermore, it is important to see how Jesus functions from who He is ontologically. The ontological declaration, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), is paralleled by a functional declaration: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Moreover, "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32) parallels "if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). And upon the question "What is truth?" (John 18:38) it is as though the answer is retroactively given: "Your word is truth" (John 17:17b). It is Jesus who arrests the perpetual fracturing of the *imago* (John 17:17a), but in the context of a *message* that He testifies to, embodies and fulfils; a message very clearly declaring objective truth.

2.5 Conclusion

Following Warfield and Hodge, this chapter sought to establish theism as a necessary steppingstone to the defence of inerrancy. As such, the question primary to this chapter was determined to be the following. What are the implications of divine ontology and human ontology as they are biblically defined? The implications are seen to emerge when answering the attendant "preliminary" ontological questions, "Who is God?" and "Who is humankind?" The two questions, closely linked, and profound as they are, pertain to the basis of objective reality, and human reality in turn. This is amply confirmed in Scripture, by which we understand the nature of God as infinite and that humanity is not only necessarily created by Him, but created by Him *imago Dei*. Now,

[13] A theory reconciling two prevailing metaphysical theories concerning the universe, attempting to explain the existence of matter through modality and higher dimensions congruent with quantum mechanics.

God's infinitude, or omni-essence, is seen to be biblically and philosophically (deductive argument) defensible; both channels of defence informing of the necessity of God for the existence of the universe. The latter, which was the core of this chapter's presuppositional apologetic, was aimed at the refutation of three things, primarily: naturalism, deism, and open theism. God as *necessarily* existing refutes naturalism. God as *personally* omnipresent is antithetical to deism. And God as *necessarily* infinite leaves no room for open theism; displaced as it is by the implication that God cannot err. There are many more implications that result from humanity as *imago Dei*, not least of which the fact that humanity is *most* complex if derived from God. Another implication is that humanity is *most* valued if indeed valued by God as the highest creature, His very *imago.* Plainly, then, on account of such value, and on account of the personal nature of God, divine revelation, variously embodied, is well motivated. And Scripture, being one such embodiment, not only communicates the value of humanity as the *imago*, but also communicates that humanity is divinely purposed; indeed, this is climactically communicated in the person of Jesus and the message of the gospel, upon which all Scripture is centred.

CHAPTER 3 DEFINING AND DEFENDING INERRANCY

3.1 Introduction

With the doctrines of God, humanity, and revelation outlined we can progress toward a Scripture principle (or doctrine of Scripture). The endeavour of this chapter is defining and defending inerrancy, thereby highlighting the importance of inerrancy to a Scripture principle. Of course, the matter of inerrancy is invariably determined with respect to one's Scripture principle. By Scripture we gain a particular understanding of the nature of God, humanity, and revelation, but it is likewise pertinent to understand the nature of Scripture itself. Indeed, Scripture testifies to its own nature (2 Tim 3:16; Ps 119:160), a God derived nature, which cannot be dismissed as inconsequential. It is on the order of importance of factors in the defence of inerrancy that we disagree to some extent with Warfield and Hodge (2015:8) who propose one should "first establish theism, then the historical credibility of the Scriptures, and then the divine origin of Christianity". As to the precedence of the first point we concur, but the historical credibility of the Scriptures is here viewed as supplementary to the more primary divine source of Christianity, as it pertains to Scripture's self-testimony. Venema (1989:112-113) draws out this sentiment against Warfield's method, calling it "self-defeating": "… for Warfield, the reliability and certainty of the Bible did not rest simply upon an appeal to Scripture's own self-testimony, but also upon rational proofs and evidences. In his apologetics, Scripture as the norm for all theological affirmation was itself subject to rational vindication". In agreement with the latter and what it cautions against, this study inclines more towards deductive and presuppositional methodologies of reason; not to eschew the place of other methodologies. Certainly, rational vindication and external proofs can supplement the argument, but they are not primary bases. As Grudem (1992:19) has identified, the self-testimony of Scripture's nature is itself historical witness. However, it is the divine nature as witnessed to that is of primary interest, as certain implications follow from it necessarily. 2 Timothy 3:16 is arguably the pivotal passage[14] in the inerrancy debate, and it is regarding this reality of Scripture's self-testimony that there is much controversy (Venema, 1989:122). However controversial, engaging with the self-testimony of Scripture, exampled in various verses, is thematic in this study. That there is controversy in this area frames the inerrancy debate as more an "in-house[15] argument" between Christians (Craig, 2008a). Nevertheless, the matter is not thereby insignificant, nor barely significant as to be placed "near the periphery" (Craig, 2008a). This apologetic of inerrancy is one

[14] There are related passages: frequently paralleled with 2 Timothy 3:16 is 2 Peter 1:20-21, and Old Testament passages such as Psalm 119:160 and Proverbs 8:7-8.

[15] The term *in-house* here refers to an argument within Christian circles, but there is greater nuance within evangelicalism regarding this particular area of study.

more discourse joining a chorus of contemporary defenders, some of whom acknowledge that more defenders of the doctrine are needed (Geisler & Roach, 2011:344). They are needed because of the polemics against the doctrine of inerrancy, or towards its dilution. Critiques on the more general authority of Scripture are “seemingly endless” (Kruger, 2013). But because of what inerrancy is yoked to the doctrine, undiluted, is worth defending. The defence of inerrancy in this study invariably implies that a Scripture principle without inerrancy is markedly poorer. Farnell (2015:264) states the need for defence in no uncertain terms: “Today, more than ever before, evangelicals face a crisis being directed at orthodox concepts of inerrancy as has never before been experienced within evangelicalism. That a crisis is now brewing among evangelicals that threatens the very foundations of the inspiration and inerrancy of God’s Word is no exaggeration”. It is a matter of course that the positions of those who oppose, or dilute inerrancy and related notions of Scripture are engaged. Assuredly, there *is* adequate defence against the many critiques of Scripture’s inerrant nature. With respect to the defence of orthodox inerrancy, this study affirms the defence of *unlimited* inerrancy as synonymous.

There are voluminous works detailing inerrancy within the context of a Scripture principle, but beyond these there are more discrete testimonies to Scripture’s nature, with inerrancy notably thematic. In Bunyan’s (1987:86) poetic apology of his book *Pilgrim’s Progress*, for example, we in turn observe his apology of Scripture’s nature: “Solidity, indeed becomes the pen / Of him that writeth things divine to men: / But must I needs want solidness, because / By metaphors I speak; was not God’s laws, his Gospel-laws in olden time held forth / By types, shadows and metaphors? Yet loth / Will any sober man be to find fault / With them, lest he be found for to assault / The highest wisdom”. Spurgeon (2012:213) metaphorises similarly: “If my compass always points to the North, I know how to use it: but if it veers to other points of the compass, and I am to judge out of my own mind whether it is right or not, I am as well without the thing as with it. If my Bible is right always, it will lead me right; and as I believe it is so, I shall follow it”. Though there are many words in description of Scripture, that they are used in past generations within a context that analogises the unerring nature of Scripture is plain. Bunyan and Spurgeon are but a small reflection of a deep historical consensus on the nature of Scripture as inerrant – in the full sense of the word. But as inerrancy is a topic on which much has been written, the sentiment of Pinnock and Callen (2006:9) is a sensible one for this study also: “Our aim is not so much to uncover new data as to produce a better understanding of what we already know”. Although they write from the stance of *limited* inerrancy, they nevertheless represent well-versed scholarship in the field of inerrancy, and likewise recognise the need for “new life to an older treatment of crucial issues” (Pinnock & Callen, 2006:9). To this end, we concur. However, the term *crucial* as it is applied to inerrancy and related terms requires some distinction. Yarbrough (2011:88) elucidates: “Inerrancy is not an essential doctrine in the same sense that Christ's resurrection is, or his full divinity and humanity. Yet it is barely less than essential". To this there is longstanding agreement in Warfield and Hodge (2015:8). Therefore, we affirm with Craig (2008a) that "[inerrancy] is important to the Christian faith, but it doesn't stand at the centre of the Christian faith"; but we re-affirm as opposed to Craig (2008a) that inerrancy should not be "near the periphery".

There is a fair amount to consider contextually within Scripture as it promulgates the broad narrative of Christ; indeed, as it informs various doctrines, no less of itself. It is beyond the scope of this study to exhaustively deal with all the matters that pertain to inerrancy. However, it is the confidence of this study that expounding key principles, figures, concepts, and texts permits a strong defence of inerrancy. While it is an epistemological endeavour, it is no less a theological one too, undergirded most appropriately by a historical-grammatical approach to the material in question. This chapter takes a three-pronged approach, starting by defining pertinent terms, thereafter assessing opposition to inerrancy, and finally presenting a defence of unlimited inerrancy. This is to the end of answering the question: What is the nature of, and evidence for, biblical inerrancy?

3.2 Defining terms towards a Scripture principle

As part of an evangelical response to blanket claims of the discrepancies in Scripture, Carson (2010:206) explains that it is not appropriate to begin with the difficulties up front towards a sound Scripture principle, but after study of the biblical data as a whole, we must begin to define "whatever crucial words are used in the formulation of the doctrine – e.g., *true, infallible, sufficient, inerrant* … for no complex doctrine in any field ever escapes such restrictions". Importantly, Carson (2010:79-80) emphasises the need for a shift from induction to deduction as the primary method towards a Scripture principle. This is a sensible shift, even if only because the very inductive study intended for confirming the nature of Scripture is first prompted by the all-important claim of its nature as God-derived. At the risk of oversimplification for the moment, the matter might be encapsulated as follows: If it is fitting to understand God as the objective standard of reality, and if it is likely that God would speak out of vested interest in humanity, then what He communicates (Scripture) is imbued with the objective standard that comes from his perspective. This implication of an "objective standard" is in turn confirmed by an inductive study of the content of Scripture, validating it as the word of God[16] – at least such is the conservative evangelical position adhered to

[16] This fact is itself established with reference to Scripture, but relative factors and nuances to the constitution of Scripture as God's word (e.g., human authorship, grammar, and cultural aspects) have given

by this study. It is possible to define terms that inform a Scripture principle deductively[17], since the nature of Scripture so depends upon the nature of God. Such terms as "*true, infallible, sufficient, inerrant*," are axiomatic in God, and no less in something as personal as his word. The primacy of a deductive approach aside, Carson's (2010:81, cf. 204) repeated call for balance between methodologies of reason is indisputably wise if not necessary: "any complex theory in any field of human thought (some areas of mathematics possibly excluded) depends not only on intricate interplay between induction and deduction but on what is variously called adduction, abduction, or retroduction". To this there is substantive engagement by Feinberg (1980:275), with nuanced agreement. Exegetical consideration of all the biblical data is not within the scope of this study, but we here define terms that inform a Scripture principle by means of the broad witness of Scripture about its nature. This witness is woven throughout Scripture; the verses are indeed manifold and set within unambiguous context that is inclusive of all Scripture.

In this section, by expounding terms that inform a Scripture principle, we can assess the place of inerrancy particularly. Although inerrancy and related terms are defined with respect to theology proper, it is also important to assess the force of their lexical nature as they communicate something of divine nature. And by extension on the latter, an incongruence between the meaning of certain terms and their application is cursorily identified here. Furthermore, assessing the historical understanding of these terms – particularly inerrancy – is a necessary lead in the determination of what they most likely connote.

3.2.1 Inspiration

We begin with a term that is "correlative" (Henry, 2013:710) of the doctrine of revelation, foundational to a Scripture principle, and at the heart of Scripture's self-testimony to its nature: inspiration. As such, we ought to detail inspiration more substantively. Pivotal to the term is the defining passage 2 Timothy 3:16, wherein we observe the unique construction *θεοπνευστος* (God-breathed; breathed out by God), frequently rendered "inspired by God". Therefore, when we speak of inspiration, considering the context of this passage, we speak of a technical term, carrying intentionality in its theological complexity, emphasising the inimitable standing of Scripture against all other literature. In colloquial use there is a propensity to conceiving inspiration more in the sense of "[exerting] an animating, enlivening, or exalting influence on", or "[spurring] on" (Merriam-

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rise to debate over its nature; addressing some such inductive *difficulties* is part of the trajectory of this chapter.

[17] Deduction, specifically the deductive argument, is something to which we will return for more substantive engagement in defence of inerrancy.

Webster, 2018b). The reader of Scripture must be cognisant of the distinction implicative of divine attribution in biblical inspiration, with its sense as "[influencing], [moving], or [guiding] by divine or supernatural inspiration" (Merriam-Webster, 2018b). Granted that the product of divine inspiration is unique, to what extent and by what means (the mode) Scripture is inspired are the enduring questions of interest.

First, in engaging the extent of Scripture's inspiration, our attention must turn to the grammatical details of the phrase "*πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος*" (all Scripture is God-breathed). Small as the construction is, we may observe by it the essence of the controversy over Scripture's self-testimony emerging. The translation of *πᾶσα γραφὴ* as "all Scripture" leaves no room for speculation over the exclusion of parts of the Old Testament[18] from divine inspiration. However, this translation is called into question by referencing the exclusion of an article in the construction, which, it is argued, changes the sense of *πᾶσα* (*πας*) from "all" to "every/each" (House, 1980:55; cf., Wall & Steele, 2012:488). The terms *every* and *each* plainly lend themselves to the individualisation of passages of text, which in turn may or may not be considered Scripture. Clarity on the matter is afforded rather fittingly with respect to the understanding of *γραφὴ* (Scripture). House (1980:56) notes that *γραφὴ* is variously articular or anarthrous in Hellenistic writings outside of Scripture – therein translated simply as "a writing" – yet "never used anarthrously" in Scripture, due to its treatment as a proper noun or technical term. The general translation of *γραφὴ* as "writing", House (1980:56) notes, makes even less sense considering the predicative[19] sense of *θεόπνευστος*. The simple observation of the use of two technical terms in this immediate context reinforces the likelihood of the author's intention to reference a corpus more specific than general. Lange *et al.* (2008b:109) summarise the matter emphatically: "Although the article is wanting here, nevertheless, *by virtue of the connection*, it is not to be doubted a moment that the Apostle is speaking decidedly and exclusively of the *γραφὴ* of the Old Covenant, as of a well completed *whole*" (former emphasis added). While noting the passages Warfield cites[20] in favour of a holistic translation of *γραφὴ*, Marshall and Towner (2004:791-792) conclude, nevertheless, that "the word here refers to an individual 'Scripture'". However, there is no balancing discussion of its use as a proper noun. Given the construction, and similar instances that confirm its specific understanding (cf. House, 1980:55), there are no legs to a translation that favours segmentation.

[18] We use "Old Testament" for the sake of argument, although it has been noted that the historical context of *γραφὴ* (Scripture) is likely inclusive of some apostolic writing (Swinson, 2014:1). Wall and Steele (2012:485-486) dispute the direct inclusion of New Testament writings by this term, nevertheless agreeing on the "canonical intent" of 2 Timothy 3:15-16 toward the inclusion of the New Testament.

[19] Some have argued for an attributive sense, which would change the emphasis of the passage and complement an individualisation of the text of Scripture (cf. Bassler, 1996:167).

[20] Marshall and Towner (2004:791) reference twenty: Jn 2:22; 7:38, 42; 10:35; 17:12; 19:28; 20:9; Acts 8:32; Rom 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; Gal 3:8, 22; 4:30; 1 Tim 5:18; Jas 4:5; 1 Pet 2:6; 2 Pet 1:20.

We thus move towards the conception of the inspiration of Scripture as *plenary* (plenary verbal inspiration[21]); that is to say that all of the words of Scripture are inspired, to the inclusion of the New Testament. And here we must begin to address the second matter of interest: the mode of inspiration. That the mode is needed for a definition of biblical inspiration is clear. We may get a sense of the mode, broadly, as Warfield and Hodge (2015:17) define inspiration:

> God's continued work of superintendence, by which, his providential, gracious and supernatural contributions having been presupposed, he presided over sacred writers, in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of rendering that writing an errorless record of the matters he designed them to communicate, and hence constituting the entire volume in all its parts the word of God to us.

There is more to be said on the content of this definition, but for now our concern is the process of inspiration as dependent on divine superintendence in accordance with divine providence, grace, and the underpinning divine sovereignty. 2 Timothy 3:16 does not provide much detail of the mode of inspiration; not to detract from the imagery of the term *θεόπνευστος*, which is somewhat descriptive of the act of speaking. But if we are to leave the matter there without the colourings of additional Scripture, we would be tempted to conclude that inspiration simply involves divine dictation. Our conception is likewise impoverished if we understand divine superintendence apart from its characterful reflection in Scripture; such cultivates a one-dimensional sense. If we are acquainted with the detail of Scripture, over against the idea of a dull one-tier sovereign imposition, we are prompted to reckon with the mode of inspiration as multifaceted – which providence and grace do reflect – and as invariably tied to the wisdom of God, of which we can only plumb so far.

Efforts to glean a deeper sense of the term *θεόπνευστος* begin well with another pillar passage (2 Pet 1:20-21) of inspiration. Here it is clear that human agency is instrumental to the task of inspiration, however guided the human agent may be. But it is at the point of human agency that we must again stress distinction with contemporary notions of inspiration. Biblical inspiration is not the product of an abstract attainment after the human author's creative initiative, as may be understood contemporarily by such statements as "inspired artist", "inspired writer". Furthermore, it is best emphasised that the divine guiding in biblical inspiration is a personal work of God by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Sam 23:2), who may be direct or employ abstraction. The term *θεόπνευστος*

[21] Carson (2010:65) notes no essential historical difference between verbal inspiration and plenary inspiration; instead noting the historical interchangeability of the expressions.

fittingly parallels *πνεῦμα* (spirit), alluding to the fact that in any context of variables (certainly divine providence and grace here shine), the initiative (continuously throughout the process) for inspiration belongs to the Spirit. Piper (1984) points to "two dimensions" in inspiration beyond the already rich human dimension: "not only is *what* they [the human authors] spoke from God, but *how* they spoke it is controlled by the Holy Spirit". Considering the primacy of the Spirit's initiative, then, it is proper to understand human agency as passive in inspiration. However, it is important to emphasise that human passivity need not imply mechanical dictation as the mode of inspiration. The latter notion is contrary to Berkhof (1996:151-153), who rejects the "opposite extremes" of the passive mechanical mode and the mostly autonomous dynamic mode, favouring the organic mode as it accords better with the divine employment of the various characteristics of the human authors, who thus "were not passive but active". But this seems too much a black and white conception of the categories *passive* and *active*, considering the content of Scripture. It is possible to understand the "continuous superintendence" described by Warfield and Hodge as *continuous initiative* – divine initiative remaining sovereign, but the word *initiative* lending itself to dynamic[22] leadership more than *superintendence*. This dynamism is proved with divine initiative being either more emphatic (the Prophets: Ezek 1:3, Isa 43:1, Jer 31:37), or subtler (the Wisdom literature: Eccl 12:11, Prov 1:29-33; cf. Deut 6:1-3, Ps 2:7, 110:1; cf. 2 Sam 23:2), variously throughout the inspired text, such that the human author is either *apparently* more passive or more active, nevertheless always led by the Spirit. As Carson (2010:22-23) has observed within the prophetic context alone: "If some messages from God are cast in the most general terms, a very substantial number are cast as oracles, utterances, from God himself. Thus the prophecy of Amos modestly begins, 'The words of Amos . . .,' but oracle after oracle throughout the book is prefaced by some such expression as 'This is what the LORD says' (2:6)". Furthermore, of Jeremiah, Carson (2010:23) acknowledges that portions (Jer 30:2; 36:27–32) came in "almost dictation fashion". It appears, then, that we ought to allow for the possibility of a mixed mode of inspiration, if we depend on technical labels to describe its process, or else define the mode of inspiration simply according to personal agency of the Spirit, who inspired text by his wisdom applied to any given situation. That this is possible is further evinced by way of Carson's definition of inspiration, and appended qualification. Carson (2010:31-32) defines inspiration as "that supernatural work of God's Holy Spirit upon the human authors of Scripture such that what they wrote was precisely what God intended them to write in order to communicate his truth"; he qualifies that there is "nothing in the definition that lays down a particular mode of inspiration". This is very much in line with the confessional evangelical affirmation that what the writers of Scripture said "God said" (Warfield & Hodge, 2015:29).

[22] The word dynamic is used here for its lexical value, not with reference to the so termed *dynamic mode* of inspiration. A parallel is noted with the particular position termed *nuanced inerrancy* (cf. Lemke, 2002:185), with which we can sympathise, since there is no apparent difficulty in describing the content of Scripture as nuanced.

Whether *inspiration* means the text is inspired or the human authors were inspired, is another deliberated aspect. Geisler and Roach (2011:267) observe, as it often has been, that "it is not the authors of Scripture who are said to be 'inspired' (God-breathed) but the *graphē*, the 'writing'. The authors were 'moved' or 'carried along' by God (2 Pet 1:20–21), but it was only their writings that were inspired (breathed-out) by God". Meanwhile, Carson wants to draw attention to nuance in the convergence of 1 Tim 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21:

> If we choose to use the word 'inspired' instead of 'God-breathed', then we must say (according to this passage [2 Tim 3:16]) that it is the text that is inspired, not the human authors. Alternatively, if we attach the term 'inspire' to the fact that the human authors were 'carried along by the Holy Spirit,' then the authors of Scripture were inspired. In any case, the wording of the definition is designed to embrace both the work of the Spirit in the human author and the resulting status of the text of Scripture.

The matter is indeed complex, but it is entirely reasonable to think the authors were *temporarily* inspired, that is, filled with the divinely breathed words in the process of those words constituting the lasting written corpus. Graham (1984:105) has an important concluding observation as he reflects on the complexity of literature generally: "the process of composing a written document is by no means a clear one. Given the mystery of God, that process cannot be any more clear [*sic*] when considering the influence of divine inspiration upon a human author". If one suggests that the authors were filled with the Spirit for the task of an inspired text, but not themselves inspired, begs the question of how differentiation in the process is determined. We may hold tension with the recognition that *θεόπνευστος* is a technical term singularly applied to the corpus of Scripture, but the action by means of the Spirit that the term implies conceivably extends to the human authors as they receive Scripture.

3.2.2 Authority

We affirm that what is foundational to the authority[23] of Scripture is its ontological origin. If Scripture is breathed out by God, then His authority is surely affixed to Scripture; such as Feinberg (2018) explains, is the "commonsense conclusion". The authority we are speaking about is necessarily absolute on matters it addresses on account of its origin, such that it, in accordance with how

[23] Pertaining to authority is reliability, which is dealt with below, addressing historical grounds.

authority is defined, has “power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behaviour” (Merriam-Webster, 2018c). Paul attests to Scripture’s bearing an authority expressly distinguished from human authority, while confirming its active influence: “you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thess 2:13). There is clear correspondence with the practical usefulness (*ὠφέλιμος*) of Scripture as it is detailed in 2 Timothy 3:16, qualified by its divine origin: “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”. And given such practical outworking, there must be correspondence with reality. Indeed, the latter follows if Scripture is characterised by truth (2 Sam 7:28; John 17:17), and thereby also pertains to that sense of authority defined as “a quality that makes something seem true or real” (Merriam-Webster, 2018c).

That Scripture claims to be an absolute standard is clear enough (Ps 119:89, Matt 5:17-18). Mindful of this absolute standard of Scripture, the latter section of Psalm 138:2 presents as an interesting case study: *כִּֽי־הִגְדַּ֥לְתָּ עַל־כָּל־שִׁ֝מְךָ֗ אִמְרָתֶֽךָ* (for you have made great above all your name your word). Whichever way the text is rendered, there is a striking sense of authority ascribed to the word of God, by association with a name, which carries the authority of the person associated. We may observe this with sample renderings from the strongest to the more nuanced: “for thou hast magnified thy word above thy name” (KJV); “for you have exalted above all things your name and your word” (ESV); “for your promises are backed by all the honour of your name” (NLT); “for you have done great things to carry out your word consistent with your name” (ISV). The immediate context concerns the faithfulness of God to his promises, but there is debate over exactly what promise(s) God has been faithful to deliver by the subtle reference of this verse. It is consistently observed that the construction *הִגְדַּ֥לְתָּ* (you exalted/made great) having the verb גדל (great) is a reference to 2 Samuel 7. Keil and Delitzsch (1996:805) isolate the verb in verse 21 suggesting it is “like a hint pointing to that history, which is one of the most important crises in the history of salvation”. Lange *et al.* (2008c:644) want to maintain “historical allusions”, likely to 2 Samuel 7, on account of the promise concerning “the eternal dominion of David’s family”. Closer to certain renderings of the text, Jamieson *et al.* (1997:387) describe the verse: “God’s promise (2 Sam 7:12-16), sustained by his mercy and truth, exceeded all manifestations of Himself as subject of praise”. Even if we should isolate the reference of this verse to a particular promise, the promise is no less connected to the word of God, of the category of salvation, and so invariably communicative of the extent to which God affirms his word. Furthermore, it has been pointed out with reference to the word *אִמְרָתֶֽךָ* (אמר) (say), that it is “not the usual term for ‘word’ in the Hebrew Bible (*dāḇār*)” (Declaissé-Walford, 2014:1341). However, the root term דבר (speak) is also rendered variously as “say” (Exod 6:29, 10:29), such that there is no tangible semantic difference between דָּבָר and אִמְרָה; much as it is self-evident that speaking and words are not mutually exclusive.

There is a strong likelihood, as many suggest, that the verse implies that God places his word not over his name (singular) but his names (plural) that describe his actions and reputation. However, it is not insignificant that *Yahweh* is appended to such names. At the very least, what is implied is that the word of God is equal to or greater than such names that are disclosed by means of historical events. This means that the word of God transcends the authority afforded by historical correspondence. Thus, the authority of Scripture while corresponding to history, is not limited to it. The authority of Scripture is as robust as McDonald (2013:688) explains: "Because the Bible points beyond itself to God, it has a conferred authority. Yet the Bible has a real authority in itself as the authentic embodiment of God's self-disclosure".

3.2.3 Infallibility and inerrancy

If we say that Scripture is established as an absolute standard of truth, we may just as well say that it is infallible; such is to state it negatively but more simply. Infallibility is expressly the quality of being "incapable of error; not liable to mislead, deceive, or disappoint; incapable of error in defining doctrines touching faith or morals" (Merriam-Webster, 2018d). The latter sense reveals how intrinsic the term is to religious expression. But we do not, of course, seek to expound infallibility with respect to the doctrinal decrees of men, as in the notion of *papal infallibility*. Rather, we affirm by definition Scripture and its doctrinal decrees as infallible on account of being the decrees of God. The distinction between a human word and the word of God could not be clearer, nor that the distinction involves the vast difference between fallibility and infallibility, respectively. The emphatic Pauline proclamation encapsulates the distinction well: "Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, 'That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged'" (Rom 3:4; cf. Num 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18). Indeed, "every word of God proves true" (Prov 30:5), and as if to remove any and all speculation on the matter, the perfection of God's word is highlighted by the emphasis of its purity: the word of God is "purified seven times" (Ps 12:6).

Infallibility communicates not only that Scripture is in no way false, but that it cannot be *corrupted*. Not to be limited to the distinction between falsehood and truth, Scripture thus claims distinction from creation holistically at the same time as highlighting the total corruptibility of creation. That is why it is said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt 24:35) –

not to the least extent (Matt 5:18), and “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). The magnitude of this assertion is put into perspective when we ponder the dependability of the cosmic motion which brings us night and day, and change of season. We are reminded that such depends no less upon the word of God (Gen 8:22).

What of inerrancy? On its own, lexically, it is the quality of being “free from error” (Merriam-Webster, 2018e). But when applied in description of Scripture, it denotes a doctrine that re-affirms the doctrine of infallibility. Based on the virtual synonymity between infallibility and inerrancy (Geisler & Roach, 2011:154), endeavouring to define the one is essentially to define the other, especially as it is applied to Scripture (cf. Carson, 2010:87). Although, Geisler and Roach (2011:226) wisely suggest that maintaining both terms is preferable as it specifically substantiates *unlimited* inerrancy, precisely in view of the somewhat greater lexical strength of infallibility. Maintaining this more comprehensive affirmation of inerrancy is sensible and in line with Carson’s (2010:88) caution, referencing inerrancy, that “any one-word summary of a complex doctrine must be understood as a construct”. Therefore, wherever we seek to affirm inerrancy in this study, it is *unlimited* inerrancy, or *propositional* inerrancy (cf. Frame, 2014:29). We seek to affirm, with infallibility assumed in the manner defined above. The term *inerrancy* is the term of preference in this study given its prevalence in contemporary evangelical discussions towards a Scripture principle (cf. Woodbridge & Balmer, 1992:254).

Lastly, there is a foundational technicality to be stated in defining inerrancy. Inerrancy is only properly applied to the *original autographs*, as derived directly after the process of inspiration – such gives appropriate respect to inspiration as a unique event (cf. Warfield & Hodge, 2015:42). Feinberg’s (2013:699) definition of inerrancy is comprehensive regarding this, and to the totalising sense the terms *infallibility* and *inerrancy* convey: “Inerrancy is the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences”. This definition does not single out any one method of reason with the exclusion of others towards the conclusion, it is understood by Feinberg (1980:273-276) that part of synthesising the facts involves multiple methods of reason.

3.2.4 A convolution of terms

When we consider variance in the application of terms that are important to a Scripture principle the matter becomes complex. We may observe the use of the same terms, but with qualifications that adjust the basic meaning to form fundamentally different doctrines. This convolution of terms centres around inspiration no less, and impacts on the doctrine of inerrancy as its logical extension. For example, noting progressive variance in the use of infallibility, Feinberg (1980:288) explains that "it [infallibility] has become a term championed by many who support what has been called limited inspiration, or what today might better be called limited inerrancy". Pannenberg's (1997) brief essay captures the essence of the latter position. Outlining historical developments, Pannenberg (1997:212) implies the distortion of the reformational view of inspiration by seventeenth-century efforts towards a doctrine of "literal inspiration".[24] He continues:

> This doctrine, however, disintegrated in the course of time, not so much because theologians turned to other norms of truth than Scripture, but primarily because the idea of a doctrinal unity among all sentences of Scripture without any contradiction among them, an idea that followed from the doctrine of literal inspiration, could not be defended in the long run.

This is a sweeping statement[25], but it examples the sentiment which informs the popular warning, as Mohler Jr. (2013:30) summarises, that assenting to inerrancy will lead to "intellectual disaster". Instead, according to limited errantists, what is deemed authoritative, indeed infallible, is "the gospel, impregnated as it is by the divine Spirit"; "the criterion of scriptural authority" and "the basis of a doctrine affirming the inspiration of Scripture" (Pannenberg, 1997:213). This approach has otherwise been termed *functional inerrancy* (Lemke, 2002:186), *inerrancy of intent* (Franke, 2013:286), or *limited errancy* (cf. Carson, 2010:208); some opting rather for the term *infallibility* (Bird, 2013:149, 154). Regardless, these immediate qualifications appended to the terms *infallibility* or *inerrancy* weaken their lexical sense. Moreover, the expression *limited inerrancy* is oxymoronic, and is only made sensible through doctrinal enumeration. It seems of all the available options the expression that most sensibly describes the position is *limited errancy*. By this expression the affirmation that there are errors, but a limited number is immediately clear – and such is the essence of the counter position against inerrancy.

[24] A term synonymous with verbal inspiration, although used by opponents of inerrancy to mean something closer to the more simplistic dictation theory as opposed to the more robust verbal plenary inspiration. (Horton, 2011:336; cf. Harris, 2008:55, Warfield & Hodge, 2015:18-19).

[25] What motivates this statement, and its like, is engaged in the second section of this chapter.

There are expressions that convey a more middle-ground position. *Nuanced inerrancy* for example, "affirms that how one understands inerrancy depends on the type of biblical literature under consideration … Inerrancy is word by word in some passages (such as in law), but in other passages (such as in narrative) a long passage taken together is inerrant (Lemke, 2002:185). If one allows nuance to mean paying attention to literary genre, then it translates to sensible scholarship in formulating a doctrine of inerrancy. Recognising nuance in Scripture is not a departure from unlimited inerrancy any more than the orthodox affirmation that the human authors of Scripture employed different writing styles. However, one veers towards limited errancy by dismissing part of the narrative texts as errant if apart from the whole, since unlimited inerrantists apply inerrancy to the whole and the part of Scripture (cf. Geisler & Roach, 2011:171).

The desire to employ the terms infallible or inerrant, and to maintain the conception of Scripture as authoritative represents well that describing Scripture's nature involves an in-house debate. This is evident even in Yarborough's (2011:88) summation of the orthodox viewpoint: "Inerrancy is arguably the teaching of Scripture about itself". The word *arguably* betrays this in-house debate. But, for all the apparent complexity resultant of various terms applied to Scripture, there is in principle only one determination: "it's [Scripture] either inerrant or not" (MacArthur, 2015). Specifically, "we will either affirm the total truthfulness of the Bible in whole and in part, or we will concede that at least some parts, if not the whole, are something less than totally truthful and trustworthy" (Mohler Jr., 2013:31).

3.2.5 Historical stances

A sensible step in the determination of Scripture as either errant or inerrant is an assessment of authoritative historical consensus. It is clear, even from Pannenberg's (1997) brief dialogue with this area of study, that historical engagement is necessary. We cannot be limited to American Evangelicalism, although it exemplifies defence of Scripture by means of the term inerrancy, over and above being particularly known for a high view of Scripture (Hill, 2006:446). Nevertheless, this is not to say that evangelicalism broadly lacks a high view of Scripture as part of its core identity, nor that this high view is not synonymous with inerrancy. Indeed, broadly, the evangelical relationship to Scripture is described as follows: "[regarding] Scripture as the divinely inspired record of God's revelation, the infallible, authoritative guide for faith and practice" (Pierard & Elwell, 2013:1764-1765). Furthermore, Carson (2010:66) explains that the early twentieth-century British evangelical avoidance of the term inerrancy was based on a misconception of the doctrine the term denotes, associating it with "crude literalism", yet ironically "by modern usage, that [inerrancy] is what they believed”. The latter hints to the fact that the doctrine which the term inerrancy denotes is demonstrably long-standing even prior to the evangelical movement; as, for example, in early Protestant confession (Wright, 2013:4084), wherein the authority of Scripture was one of two “prime doctrines” (Hill, 2006:264). That there is historically an embrace of the doctrine of inerrancy without the term inerrancy, prompts agreement with Geisler and Roach (2011:162) that “there is nothing sacred about the word ‘inerrancy’. Indeed, it is not the *term* so much as it is the *truth* of inerrancy that is important to preserve”. This is, of course, not to dismiss the useful force of the term, as Geisler and Roach (2011:162) wish to stress.

We ought not to forget that Scripture is itself an historical stance, and there are not a few passages, as recorded above, that inform the reader of the position of the authors of Scripture. Granted, this is the central disputation, but it is the position of this study that a plain reading of such passages makes for clear ontological testimony, and favours the confessional evangelical affirmation of inerrancy as part of Scripture’s nature. For the moment, we turn to the affirmations of significant voices in church history towards validation.

3.2.5.1 Patristic perspectives

Baker and Mourachian (2016:xi) explain that “The patristic doctrine of Scripture is an understudied topic”, specifically “the fathers’ understanding of the nature of Scripture itself”. However, even a cursory look into patristic literature reveals that the fathers esteemed Scripture as an inerrant text (possibly with the exception of Origen [Geisler, 2011:11; cf. Origen, 2006:616], although there is no doubting his view of Scripture as “divine” on account of being God-breathed [Origen, 2006:606]). Irenaeus is always a notable starting point considering his close association with Polycarp, himself a disciple of the apostle John. Geisler (2014) makes a case study of Irenaeus, explaining that he “stood soundly” on the “verbal inspiration of Scripture” and “held to its inerrancy”; specifically referencing his work *Against Heresies*. Therein he is cited as saying that “‘Scripture is indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and his Spirit’” (Geisler, 2014). There is no doubt, therefore, that when Irenaeus (2002:571) employs the construction that translates “Thus saith the Scripture”, he thinks it no different to the expression “Thus says the LORD” (Isa 43:1). Likewise, with Clement of Rome, in his letter to the Corinthians, persistently motivating his discourse with Scripture (in fact, a trait predominant in patristic writing), making clear his belief in its unique authority. His understanding of Scripture’s nature could not be clearer upon his imploration to “Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. Observe that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them” (Clement of Rome, 2002:33). Furthermore telling of the patristic sentiment is Justin Martyr (2002:370; *bracketed insertions the translator's*); commenting on Trypho's proffered confusion at Isaiah 42:8, he challenges him:

> if [you have done so] because you imagined that you could throw doubt on the passage, in order that I might say the Scriptures contradicted each other, you have erred. But I shall not venture to suppose or to say such a thing; and if a Scripture which appears to be of such a kind be brought forward, and if there be a pretext [for saying] that it is contrary [to some other], since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another, I shall admit rather that I do not understand what is recorded, and shall strive to persuade those who imagine that the Scriptures are contradictory, to be rather of the same opinion as myself.

Thus, by Justin Martyr's apologetic, we have what might as well be the essence of defining the doctrine of inerrancy.

Augustine was as one persuaded to esteem Scripture as errorless. Commenting on Augustine's efforts against Manichaeism, Yates (2006:17-18) draws attention to the importance of Augustine's interpretation of Genesis; with the example of the creation narrative he is cited as recording the response of God to his prayerful musings over its truth: "'O man, what my scripture says, I say'". Augustine's *Confessions* has much similar attestation of the nature of Scripture. At one time, Augustine (2011:105) considered Scripture "unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Tully". And in his humble record of spiritual growth from Plato to Scripture, Augustine (2011:205-206) asserts,

> … it was Thy pleasure that I should fall before I studied Thy Scriptures, that it may be impressed on my memory how I was affected by them … Most eagerly, then, did I seize that venerable writing of Thy Spirit, but more especially the Apostle Paul; and those difficulties vanished away, in which he at one time appeared to me to contradict himself, and the text of his discourse not to agree with the testimonies of the Law and the Prophets.

Augustine was not the only church father who journeyed towards a high esteem of Scripture. It has been noted of Athenagoras that "he was won over to Christianity while reading the Scriptures in order to controvert them" (Pratten, 2004:200). Nevertheless, Augustine's (2011:355) studious journey undoubtedly informs his proclamation concerning Scripture: "all of us who read endeavour to trace out and to understand that which he whom we read wished to convey; and as we believe him to speak truly, we dare not suppose that he has spoken anything which we either know or suppose to be false". Augustine's statements in light of their like above, show the patristic accord on the nature of Scripture as God-breathed and therefore inerrant in full extent.

3.2.5.2 Reformation sentiments

If we consider the sentiments of the medieval period in the Western church, the popular opinion was that "the Bible was the book of guidance above all others" (Nelson & Kempf, 2015:1), more particularly that "the Bible was the highest authority, if its meaning was not interpreted by others[26]" (Hartmann, 2015:114). This hints at the fact that the general understanding of the authority of Scripture came with a certain confinement to superficial literalism and the church establishment. And given the scant dispensation of Scripture, restricted by medieval Catholicism, comprehensive study of Scripture was ill-afforded. This is contrary to the spirit of the patristic age, where a greater openness to substantive engagement of Scripture is evident; as Tertullian (2006:420) prompted: "you who would indulge in a better curiosity … run over the apostolic churches, in which the very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their own authentic writings are read". Such an invitation does, however, inform of an accessibility and relationship to Scripture more unique to the patristic period. At the point of the Reformation there had been much more history, and with more history, more convolution. Packer (1992:352) outlines the matter:

> Since Pentecost the Holy Spirit has been present and active in the church, and part of His ministry has been to teach God's people to understand the Scriptures and the message they contain (cf. Luke 24:44ff.; 1 Cor 2:1–16; 2 Cor 3:14– 4:6; 1 Thess 1:5, cf. 2:13; 1 John 2:20–27, cf. 5:20). That is why from the first it was expected, and rightly, that the doctrinal and ethical tradition stemming from the apostles – a tradition the bishops were set to guard and the ecumenical creeds came to enshrine – would prove on examination to be, so far as it went, true exposition of that which was central in the two Testaments. The medieval faith on this point could be summarized in the neat formula that Scripture is in tradition and tradition is in Scripture … When the Reformers' study of the Bible's literal sense (on which, according to Aquinas, all doctrine should rest) showed that with regard to the economy of grace (the way of salvation and the nature and role of the church) latter-day tradition and interpretation had gone radically wrong.

[26] "Others" in this context refers to laypersons.

Packer's outline provides as sense of the convolution against which the Reformers took their stand – reaffirming the unique authority of Scripture as their position. Martin Luther, as though imploring a return to the patristic spirit, could not have made his position clearer with respect to what informs his conscience on matters of faith (cf. Schaff, 2005). Luther's declaration before the Diet of Worms is emphatic: "Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the word of God" (Schaff, 2005). Hill (2006:251) recounts Luther's engagement with Johann Eck on the matter of papal infallibility (and with reference to the early reformer, Jan Hus): Luther charging in effect, and in accord with Hus, that such a doctrine "had been unknown to the early church: in particular, it was not to be found in the Bible". Luther's sense of Scripture as supremely authoritative is plain. That erring tradition is made the counter-example reflects Luther's understanding that Scripture's unique authority is substantiated by its entire truthfulness, and that therefore it is a standard by which to test the substance of conviction. Undoubtedly, Luther is convinced of where the authority of Scripture is rooted: "'Scripture, although also written of men, is not of men nor from men, but from God'" (Geisler, 2011:18). On the interplay of Luther's belief in the divine origin of Scripture and the entire truthfulness of Scripture, the often-cited summation of Paul Altheus on Luther's position is particularly helpful as Woodbridge (1982:53) expands upon it:

> 'We may trust unconditionally only in the Word of God and not in the teaching of the fathers: for the teachers of the church can err and have erred. Scripture never errs. Therefore it alone has unconditional authority.' For Luther, Christ the living Word undoubtedly gives to the Bible, the written Word, its authority. But in another sense it is fair to say that the Bible is authoritative because it is infallible.

It is not feasible to argue that Luther sought to define the nature of Scripture in terms of *indeceivability* in the functional-salvific sense used by limited errantists (cf. Feinberg, 1980:288). Luther defines Scripture's lack of "deception" in a totalising sense, down to every word (Geisler, 2011:18). It is fitting, then, that such a position should be summed by the famed reformed expression *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), by which both the sufficiency and clarity of Scripture is affirmed. John Calvin's (1958:85) understanding is no different (of 2 Timothy 3:16); he sets his view forward in a manner even stronger (perhaps even too strong), in saying, "Scripture … is from God alone, and unmixed with anything human". He continues to describe the usefulness of

Scripture as the “perfect rule”, qualifying that Scripture “is free from the kind of corruption which comes with the abuse of God’s Word by sinful men”. Calvin’s statements are intentionally directed toward distinguishing the text of Scripture from the category of human imperfection, however much human interpretation may have the propensity to err. Clearly, Calvin’s distinction also infers the difference between Scripture and tradition, with special emphasis.

3.2.5.3 The Princetonians

New challenges to the authority of Scripture came to the fore with the modern era. Since the Enlightenment, it had fast become popular to frown upon political and religious authority. This was further accentuated with the rise of liberal theology, critical methods applied to Scripture, and increasing predisposition to the dichotomising of science and faith. The Princetonians, Benjamin Warfield and Archibald Hodge, proved themselves bastions against this tide, having sought to re-affirm the authority of Scripture and its nature according to orthodox evangelicalism (cf. Hill, 2006:365). By their efforts they produced many individual works in defence of such a view of Scripture, but their joint work *Inspiration* has remained a reference point for scholarship in the defence of an orthodox view on Scripture. The term *inerrancy* is not employed in the discourse, but the principles of the doctrine are manifestly clear given the context of their use of the term *infallible*. In addition to distinguishing God’s “revelation of saving truth”, Scripture as a whole is referred to as “an infallible record of that revelation absolutely errorless by means of inspiration” (Warfield & Hodge, 2015:9).

Based on their emphatic position, and the distinction with which it is substantiated, Warfield and Hodge have been charged by the likes of Ernest Sandeen, Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, with having “formulated a new theory of inspiration in response to the attacks of biblical criticism” (Balmer, 1982:267). After exampling the conventional nineteenth-century position on inspiration, with the sentiments of Lemuel Moss, Leonard Woods and Richard Watson, Balmer (1982:269) concludes rightly: “To portray them [the Princetonians] as isolated ideologues posturing awkwardly in order to fend off biblical criticism fails to take into account the broad range of nineteenth-century theologians who shared similar views of the Bible quite independently of the Princetonians”. To the given examples we may add the views of two nineteenth-century Irish theologians, William Digby and William Bushe, in a work predating *Inspiration*, and centred around discussion of the religious controversy in Ireland of the period, distilling the difference between the authority of Scripture and tradition. Digby (1861:9) in his reply to the work of John Milner identifies a “‘false fact’”, namely that “it is not true, that a reference to ‘Scripture only’ for ‘determining religious questions’ is *productive* of ‘*errors*’. Truth can never be the fountain from which error flows; though the exhibition of truth may, and does, serve to *elicit*, and thus to *detect*, and *expose*, errors”. Clearly, Scripture is here presented as objectively truthful and errorless; the appended acknowledgment of Scripture’s ability to “expose errors” hints of accordance with how Paul describes the usefulness of Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). Inerrancy is likewise implied by Bushe (1861:11), who, in the spirit of the Reformation, declares: “Now by the Scriptures of God, as the standard and test of truth we try the pretentions and claims and hopes of all religions whatsoever: by these we discover their fallacy or confirm their truth”. Where Scripture is understood as the “standard” of truth, we cannot logically suppose that any error whatsoever would be conceded as part of Scripture.

Besides the broad consensus of inerrancy in the nineteenth-century, the above historical outline has sampled positions on Scripture that affirm inerrancy since the early patristic period. As such, pinning inerrancy as a brainchild of Protestant scholasticism by the Princetonians follows less convincingly (cf. Rogers and McKim, 1999:187). It does not follow from the context of the sampled historical understandings that the Princetonians projected a redefinition of such terms as *infallible* and *inspiration* towards inerrancy in historical statements. Undoubtedly, such evidence would motivate critiques[27] against Sandeen, Rogers, and McKim and their proposal of inerrancy as an article of the modern period.

3.2.5.4 More recent stances

At the beginning of the twentieth-century, the evangelical effort to establish fundamental tenets of Christianity led to what is termed fundamentalism; which with its polemic having been particularly focussed against liberalism and higher criticism, involved strong affirmation of the authority and inerrancy of Scripture (cf. McIntire, 2013:2044). The association is so strong that some have implied that one defending inerrancy is *ipso facto* a fundamentalist – today caricatured as one fixated on a core set of beliefs *irrespective of undermining evidence*.[28] Williams (1996:51), for example, elaborates his frustration at “the fundamentalist mind-set which makes it difficult to refute inerrancy”. Ironically, Warfield as ardent an inerrantist as he was, also entertained Darwinism.[29]

[27] We record here, for example, the essay by Woodbridge and Balmer (1992:251-279) critiquing Sandeen; and Woodbridge’s (1982) more lengthy work critiquing Rogers and McKim.

[28] There is a true juxtaposition between conservatism and radical fundamentalism, but it appears that radical fundamentalism is all too often projected (incorrectly) as true of fundamentalism as a whole (cf. Geisler & Roach, 2011:171).

[29] Zaspel (2010:198; 211) dialogues with the findings of Livingstone and Noll on this matter, but concludes that Warfield’s writings convey agnosticism concerning Darwinism, rather than assent. Regardless, such does not fit the caricature of imperviousness to evidence that may challenge belief paradigms.

This alone should give pause before concluding on a direct link between fundamentalism and inerrancy, or defining inerrancy simply in terms of fundamentalism. However, apprehension to stating inerrancy as a fundamental Christian belief is difficult to warrant while referring to the broad history affirming the doctrine. Given some overlaps between conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism (cf. Carson, 2010: 61-62, 292), it is easy to see how Sandeen (1970) could attempt to discredit inerrancy by espousing that the doctrine was motivated by "prototypic fundamentalist belief" (Woodbridge, 2017) of the nineteenth-century. Despite the fact that one cannot stop at the origins of fundamentalism (broad though the historical margins may be) to account for adherence to inerrancy, Carson (2010:61-62) does well enough to show some disparity between conservatism and fundamentalism; both nevertheless adhering to inerrancy (cf. Geisler & Roach, 2011:173).

The contributions of Sandeen, Rogers and McKim are part of an influx in the discourse on inerrancy during the latter half of the twentieth-century. Harold Lindsell is another important figure, with his instigative work *The Battle for the Bible* (1976). Its re-affirmation of inerrancy challenged the withdrawal of theological institutions from inerrancy, and the dilution of the doctrine to apathy. Considering his work, Lindsell is fittingly described as a whistle-blower; a catalyst to the serious contemporary substantiation and defence of inerrancy best exampled by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) (1977-1989) and its resulting works; the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI) (1978), the most prominent (Geisler & Roach, 2011:12). Although, at the time, Lindsell's strong stance against fence-line sentiment towards inerrancy was perceived as threatening to the unity of evangelicalism (Dayton, 1976:976; Rogers & McKim, 1999:475). That Lindsell's work has been recognised as a primary stimulus towards the ICBI certainly disproves the initial assessment of it being "the last irrational flailings of a discredited party about to be deposed", as Dayton (1976:980) recorded, among similar assessments. Nevertheless, at this point in history, the controversy over the doctrine, particularly as expressed by the word inerrancy, is most noticeable – emotive and in need of clarification.

The manner in which the CSBI (ICBI, 1978:2) begins to define inerrancy in its short statement is telling of the central counter premise of limited errancy:

> Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

The CSBI affirmation is of unlimited inerrancy against a doctrine of inerrancy that is defined only in terms of salvation; this is the central thrust as the position is expounded. And while expounding its position, the statement rises to the challenge of systematic clarification. The rather elaborate articles of affirmation and denial within the CSBI clearly aim to address all adjunct aspects involved in affirming unlimited inerrancy. Nevertheless, it is noted that Carson (2010:58), although a defender of unlimited inerrancy himself, recognises weaknesses in some of the resulting works of the ICBI, to do with a lack of depth, and a lack of sensitivity concerning adherents of the doctrine of inerrancy. However, the CSBI remains among the most comprehensive of statements for matters concerning inerrancy. By repeated incorporation of the CSBI articles in dialogue with authorship, Geisler and Roach (2011) have shown that the contemporary controversy over the nature of inerrancy still revolves largely around what the CSBI addresses.

In summary, inerrancy defined in terms of the all-encompassing description of divine inspiration leads more naturally to defining inerrancy as unlimited, but with the important qualifier "*in all its teaching"* (ICBI, 1978:2, emphasis added), or "*in all it affirms*" (Feinberg, 2013:699, emphasis added). Such a definition is furthermore consistent with historical stances certainly antedating the Princetonians, and indeed the nineteenth century. Therefore, inerrancy as unlimited is more consistent with evangelicalism (this is also a thematic emphasis of Geisler and Roach's (2011) defence) (cf. Carson, 2010:56), and also consistent with the manner in which evangelicalism itself has been defined (cf. Packer, 1992:327). With the above in mind we move on to briefly assess opposition to inerrancy in general and unlimited inerrancy in particular, noting its roots in secular ideology. This intermediary step orients the effort of defending inerrancy by particularising objections to inerrancy.

3.3 Opposition to inerrancy

In the previous chapter we dialogued with deistic paradigms, showing its influence on theology proper, and the respective view on the nature of Scripture apart from revelation. Now, Deism, although a focussed attack on special revelation and anything miraculous, owed its modern impetus to the Enlightenment (Hill, 2006:317-318) and its hostility towards religious and political authority generally. Bristow (2017) rightly observes that the Enlightenment represents more than a historical period across the West; "For Enlightenment thinkers themselves, [it is] a process of social, psychological or spiritual development, unbound to time or place". It is understandable, for example, that "English deists such as [John] Toland and [Matthew] Tindal regarded themselves as reforming Christians, purging Christianity of superstitious nonsense that had accumulated over the centuries" (Hill, 2006:318), considering the Enlightenment mindset of "spiritual development". However, such "spiritual development" is plainly at the expense of much Scripture, attempting synonymity between reason and spirituality. It is noteworthy that *reason* as lauded by Enlightenment sentiment is qualified as reason applied towards criticism: "To be 'enlightened' meant, as all insisted, to be critical, and criticism necessarily involves the use of reason" (Pagden, 2013:16). The latter sentiment is consistent with opposition to inerrancy as observed in liberal theology and neo-orthodoxy by the use of higher-criticism; critical reason certainly sacrosanct in secular dealings with Scripture. In the latter categories criticism towards negation is predominant. While particularising objections to inerrancy allows for focussed defence, the effort to outline opposition to inerrancy in this section also affords more nuanced demonstration that denying inerrancy involves the diminution of other integral elements of a Scripture principle, such as the complementary authority and inspiration of Scripture. The opposition's elevation of reason over Scripture, whether subtle or overt, is the essence of this diminution. The above amounts to saying that the Enlightenment has been instrumental in much of the contemporary approach to Scripture[30]. As we progress through the aforementioned categories, we see that opposition to inerrancy is not necessarily an outright dismissal of the divine authority of Scripture, although sometimes it is. Nevertheless, the movements we consider lend and progress from each other, the result of which is an opposition to inerrancy in some form or another; the place of such notions as limited errancy.

3.3.1 Liberal theology

We begin with liberal theology[31], one of the largest alternative theological movements of the nineteenth-century[32]. Today, liberalism "has too wide a reference" (Hobson, 2014:12), and as such, "is an extremely elusive concept" (Pierard, 2013:2917). Johnson (2010:14) insightfully pins this elusiveness on "the question of the relationship between liberalism and the Enlightenment". Failing the consideration of all the various sub-branches of liberalism, it may, for the purposes of this

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30 The effects of Enlightenment sentiment on the study of Scripture have not only been negative. For example, Carson (2010:173) has identified significant usefulness in applying the tools of literary criticism with an evangelical mooring.

31 Also referred to as theological liberalism, with some regarding modernism, which confluently arose in the United States, as synonymous (Hill, 2006:361; cf. Pierard, 2013:2917). We will employ the term liberalism, majoritively, with adjectival differentiation where necessary.

32 Liberalism did overlap Romanticism: another significant theological movement, originating at the end of the eighteenth-century, opposing the nineteenth-century liberalism and its Enlightenment sentiments (Stewart, 1920:365; cf. Hill, 2006:353).

section, suffice to say that opposition to the authority of Scripture is a defining tenet of liberalism; where opposition is against authority generally, with all subjected to the "tests of reason and experience" (Pierard, 2013:2917). Such a summary helpfully shows the Enlightenment roots of liberalism, but it is really half the story. We must recount the difference between two main branches of liberalism precisely because it serves to demonstrate some separation from the Enlightenment principles predisposed to controverting the authority of Scripture. We refer to that distinction outlined by Hobson (2014:12-15): between the dubbed "Liberal Theology A" (hereafter *A*) and "Liberal Theology B" (hereafter *B*), where the former, deemed "bad", represents the effort to reform Christianity closer to Enlightenment rationalism, while the latter, deemed "good", "affirms a deep affinity between the gospel and political and cultural liberty". Johnson (2010:14) records similarly, by means of the work of John Gray, William Galston and Nancy Rosenblum, these "faces" of liberalism: where *A* might be summarised as a "moral ideal" of rationalism, and *B* a "political *modus vivendi*" towards tolerance. Notably, Johnson (2010:17-19) highlights the convolution surrounding the concept of tolerance – itself stemming from the moral framework of the Enlightenment – and its disparate, awkward, application to the heightened pluralism of the contemporary context[33]. Locke's (2011b:258) work, largely advancing political liberalism, accords mostly with *B*. That he distances himself from *A* by softening the role of reason is clear: "I do not mean that we must consult reason, and examine whether a proposition revealed from God can be made out by natural principles, and if it cannot, that then we may reject it: but consult it we must, and by it examine, whether it be a revelation from God or no" (Locke, 2011a:167). Although Locke gives considerable room for reason, by stating the primacy of revelation he cannot be lumped with the Deists, as was done at one time (cf. Bennet, 1919:423). Furthermore, liberalism, while sharing the rationalistic tendencies of Deism, juxtaposes it with a "central idea" being "divine immanence" (Pierard, 2013:2918). However, there is a tipping of the hat to Deism in that divine immanence is set forward in rationalistic and ethereal terms with respect to Scripture. We may observe this in the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher – a somewhat ironic figure, both influenced by Kantian Romanticism and regarded as the father of modern liberalism. Presupposing the needlessness of divine inspiration for *propositional* revelation on account of the ease with which doctrines (or sentences) are constructed by plain intellect, Schleiermacher (1911:133) expounds as follows:

> Doctrines therefore can be considered of supernatural origin only as parts of a larger whole, as descriptions of the life energies of a thinking Being who, as a personal existence, works in an original way in our self-consciousness by his advent into our sphere of life and by the total impression of his person. This is the original fact upon which the Christian communion is

[33] There is more to be said on pluralism and the contemporary context in the next chapter. Pluralism as it is mentioned here is overarching (including socio-cultural and religious categories).

founded. Revelation is only to be assumed where not a single activity but a whole Existence is determined by such a divine communication.

The above is a description of revelation by divine immanence which, by rationalising doctrinal detail as spurious, permits an undefined, and therefore ethereal divine immanence. Schleiermacher (1911:134) continues relativistically: “There is revelation, therefore, in all religious communions. None can claim that its own possession of divine communication is full and perfect truth and all others are false, because an announcement of God, if it is to be operative upon us, cannot be of him as he is in himself, but only of him in his relation to us”. Special revelation is hereby dismissed in favour of an overarching general revelation. A legitimate precursory query of this stance is why only an indirect knowledge of God’s person is assumed given the biblical data of his self-disclosure as He is: the recorded awareness of his transcendent holiness (or otherness) as part of experiencing his immanence (Exod 3:5, 14). Perhaps it is because such disclosure is parcelled with the miraculous (cf. Luke 5:8-9). There is no less a dismissal of the detail of Scripture in Schleiermacher’s perspective than in *A*, where the event-specific miraculous is externalised and relativised; as, for example, recorded of David Strauss in his *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (Hill, 2006:360-361). Scepticism is methodologically necessary to the higher criticism characteristic of liberalism; involving the presupposition of error. This was the emerging academic context within which Warfield contended for inerrancy. Indeed, Warfield held his beliefs during the proverbial “heyday” of liberalism, but with such success as to be identified as “‘the spoiler of theological liberalism’” (Zaspel, 2018). Although it is noted that the latter half of the twentieth-century saw the academic decline of *A* (Hobson, 2014:12), to the extent that it persists “in liberal (or ‘progressive’) sections of the churches” (Hobson, 2014:15) is the extent to which it remains a threat to the doctrine of inerrancy. And of *B*, there remains the danger of subjecting Scripture to the marching rhythms of culture, instead of, by the affinity *B* claims possible, transforming culture in line with Scripture. To the extent that it may uphold the latter is the extent to which it is essentially compatible with the doctrine of inerrancy (cf. Hobson, 2014:19).

3.3.2 Neo-orthodoxy

As new movements so often develop opposingly out of earlier movements, we see that out of those from the “liberal persuasion” the neo-orthodox movement was birthed; a development once quaintly described as “a profound theological ferment” (Wright, 1946:87). This is attributed to the fact that while neo-orthodoxy opposed liberalism, its middle-ground stance also opposed conservatism – an opposition strongly related to conceptions of the nature of Scripture, combining literary criticism towards a “freer, less rigid view of inspiration” (Wright, 1946:87) and the authority of Scripture as the Word of God. However, as the movement developed with a diversity of views, defining it is difficult, and as such “it is not a unified movement; it does not have a commonly articulated set of essentials” (Schnucker, 2013:3478). We must recount early articulations descriptive of the movement with respect to its founding members to assess the movement with less convolution. It is therefore poignant to bring Karl Barth to the fore, noted as the father of neo-orthodoxy, along with more well-known front-runners such as Emil Brunner and Dietrich Bonhoeffer; all[34] propounding what was alternately known as *crisis theology*, or *dialectical theology* (cf. Bradshaw, 2006:425). By way of Barth’s history, we can confirm that neo-orthodoxy was primarily a movement away from nineteenth-century liberalism. Barth, having been schooled within liberalism, and himself influenced by Georg Hegel (Powell, 2006:354), is said to have later “washed his hands of liberal theology” (Hill, 2006:424). And if, as it is rumoured, Barth directed his early polemic lectures against a bust of Schleiermacher – which he concludingly smashed – then it is a movement characterised by a particularly emotive revulsion (Sproul, 2019). And no wonder, since the reality of the First World War could not but force a negative reckoning of the humanistic optimism within liberalism; indeed, *crisis theology* is a name descriptive of the historical context. Such a context facilitated the emphasis of revelation and faith as necessities, motivated by the reality of divine transcendence – transcendence very much a key theme. But it is the alternate name, *dialectical theology*, that best reflects how Barth and his kindred functioned methodologically.[35] Kuhn (1947:47) observes the nature of the movement as a contemporary: “The thinkers of this school have sought to harmonize a pessimistic interpretation of man with the insights of modern science into human nature and human behaviour. In support of their position, they adduce the present world situation, and seek to utilize as well the pessimistic anthropology which they feel to be characteristic of the Christian Scriptures”. An over-emphasised divine transcendence explains well both the neo-orthodox reliance on revelation, and the pessimistic anthropology developed from it. But that divine revelation, with all the pessimism interpreted from it, was also considered to aid such a far-gone state of humanity, shows the paradoxicality central to the dialectical method. It is why Barth (1960:70) was later forced to place more sensibly his conviction of “God absolutely unique … overpoweringly lofty and distant, strange, yes even wholly other” within a lecture entitled “*The Humanity of God*”, attempting elaborations of divine revelation to explain away the paradox. It is understandable also that Barth would have struggled with passages in Romans, communicating the prominence of divine immanence (cf. Kuhn 1947:53). Here neo-orthodoxy smacks of a confused Deism: urging contentment with the mystery of God’s immanence and transcendence at once, while suggesting that when God is immanent in whatever

[34] There are more front-runners across the Western geographic spectrum who championed neo-orthodoxy: the German-American Paul Tillich and the American Reinhold Niebuhr are two of the more notable.
[35] The dialectical method somewhat ironically stemmed from Hegel, one of the darlings of liberalism (cf. Powell, 2006:254).

revealed sense, it is really an illusory, undefined immanence (cf. Barth, 1960:70). Alas, it is not an actual contentment with the mystery that God is sovereignly both; it is more a rationalisation of how God's transcendence remains intact while He appears immanent. Kuhn (1947:51-53), citing the influence of Søren Kierkegaard's transcendental doctrines on Barth, was justified in his inclination "that these thinkers [neo-orthodox] are employing hyperboles for the purpose of emphasizing one idea which they feel to have become lost in modern thinking, namely the doctrine of the transcendence of God". But to Barth's (1960:72-74) credit, in development of the above-mentioned lecture, he acknowledges such over-emphasis thematic of the movement early on, calling for "*revision*", explaining that it "showed greater similarity to the deity of the God of the philosophers than to the deity of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob". Barth's lecture does indeed hold better the tension between the immanence of God and his transcendence. However, when it comes to the "Word of God",[36] commendably prized though it is, the proper tension is not held. Here we have that undefined immanence all over again, where God is indeed living, speaking and acting (cf. Barth, 1960:75), although never supposed clearly or closely enough to make the *Word of God* the *words of God*; this lack of plurality is well noted (Geisler & Roach, 2011:278; cf. Sproul, 2019). To Barth (2010b:99) the writing of Scripture is "obviously not primary, but secondary", "Holy Scripture cannot stand alone as the Word of God in the Church" (Barth, 2004b:501); alongside such expressions as "the original Word of God *in* Scripture" (Barth, 2004b:501, emphasis added). The latter pertains to what is considered the "Barthian formula that Scripture *becomes* the Word of God to its readers and hearers" (Packer, 1992:346). Furthermore, the pessimistic anthropology, lingering as it is, understandably inclines neo-orthodoxy towards the preclusion of the notion of an errorless written revelation at the hands of fallen humanity (cf. Geisler & Roach, 2011:275). Be this as it may, what then plainly arises is the doctrine of the limited errancy of Scripture. Barth (2004b:532) makes this clear while expounding divine inspiration[37]: "This text in all its humanity, including all the fallibility which belongs to it, is the object of this work and miracle". And in accord with Barth, Bonhoeffer (1997:30), commenting on Genesis 1:6-10 begins, "Here we have before us the ancient world picture it in all its scientific *naïveté*". He continues: "The idea of verbal inspiration will not do. The writer of the first chapter of Genesis is behaving in a very human way". In short, there is much emphasis on the human element of Scripture, but through that same pessimistic lens. Likewise, Brunner (1946:128) explains: "The Apostolic writings never claim for themselves a verbal inspiration of this kind, with the infallibility which it implies. The Apostle Paul … never claims that his letters are written at God's dictation … he permits us to see quite plainly the natural,

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[36] Threefold: revealed, preached, and written, as Barth (2010:85) would have it.

[37] Barth has been criticised for "underplay[ing] … the place and role of inspiration in authorship" (Brazier, 2012:59), although he readily recounts the orthodox position on inspiration (Barth, 2004:524). Indeed, Barth (1968:18) admits "certain affinities" with verbal inspiration in his work, albeit alongside some questionable presuppositions such as synonymity between divine dictation and verbal inspiration, and that verbal inspiration is a product of modern theology as his fellows in turn presuppose.

human way in which these letters were written". The latter follows after Brunner's (1946:120) caution and serious charge: "the written word, the Bible, as the 'Word of God' exclusively – as is the case in the traditional equation of the 'word' of the Bible with the 'Word of God' – an error which is constantly on the verge of being repeated – is actually a breach of the Second Commandment: it is the deification of a creature, bibliolatry". This charge is best understood in light of the neo-orthodox existentialist view of revelation, revolving around humanity's event-based experience of God as primary (cf. Barth, 2010b:10, 99). The latter comes with the emphasis on Scripture as it points to Jesus Christ as the Word of God, but in a manner that implies a canon within a canon (cf. Dafydd Jones, 2012:177), such that objective truth is cannot be sourced from Scripture as a whole (cf. Barth, 1968:19) by virtue of its coming from fallible human hands. It is necessary to defend the doctrine of inerrancy against certain presuppositions which motivate the likes of the above neo-orthodox statements, although there is room for *nuanced* approval of these statements.

3.3.3 Additional objectors and objections

Stonehouse's (1958:9) prediction regarding Barth's doctrine of Scripture was correct: "we may anticipate an increasing impact in the years ahead". This is not to imply that all opposition to inerrancy post Barth traces back to Barth directly. C. S. Lewis (2017b:435-436), for example, in a letter to his brother, is bluntly critical of Barth on account of anti-reason overtones, describing him as a "dreadful man … who seems the right opposite number to Karl Marx". However, while describing Lewis' rejection of "Fundamentalist"[38] inerrancy, Brazier (2012:72) is reminded of Barth, considering Lewis' position on revelation and Scripture. Now, we may simplify the perspective of Barth and Lewis on Scripture as an article of writing *necessarily* flawed, on account of being a human product; language itself by implication being necessarily flawed – an "errant medium" (Sparks, 2008:249). This long surviving sentiment of Scripture has carried over into the contemporary context. Both Lewis' and Barth's influence in orthodox evangelical circles on this matter is undeniable. As it has been extensively recounted by Geisler and Roach (2011:38), Clark Pinnock, the once front-line defender of inerrancy, later relied on Barth as a justification for his shift to limited errancy, explaining that "Barth was right to speak about a distance between the Word of God and the text of the Bible", and that "we have exaggerated the perfection of the Bible" for fear of "modern secularism" (Pinnock, 1998:99). All the while, Pinnock (1998:ix) at that time described himself as an evangelical. Now, Enns (2014:1030) relays the history of neo-evangelicalism comparatively to evangelicalism precisely enough that we may deduce that Pinnock is more

[38] Here we have that belief that inerrancy is more properly a fundamentalist doctrine; where inerrancy is perceived as motivated by the presupposition that all Scripture says is either historical or scientific fact (cf. Lewis, 2017a:127, 131).

suitably categorised in the former.[39] Indeed, it is confirmed as such after Pinnock (2006:258) in a later edition of *Scripture Principle* refers to his position as neo-evangelical, omitting his prior claims to evangelicalism (Pinnock, 2006:12). Of course, Pinnock's Scripture principle is just as suitably called Barthian. But with respect to Lewis, Pinnock (2006:258) explains that his move "bore similarity" to him. So, what specifically characterised Pinnock's move away from inerrancy? It is twofold. 1) Accepting the charge against inerrancy as developed from gross rationalism *qua* Barth,[40] and 2) lauding the flexibility that comes with regarding Scripture as partly errant by extension of its diversity and humanity *qua* Lewis (Pinnock, 2006:258-259; cf. Lewis, 2017a:130). Pinnock later added theological motivation: open theism[41], duly noted as a central point of controversy in Pinnock's career (cf. Geisler & Roach, 2011:223). This, another "reform" in Pinnock's theology, seemingly developed in proportion to his emphasis on human variability: "Our God-talk is always open to re-evaluation because mistakes can be made and need correcting", since "One's theology is a work of human construction, even when based in divine revelation" (Pinnock, 2001:ix). Furthermore, it is to Pinnock's (2006:11-12) credit that he notes the gravity of the historical acceptance of inerrancy. Nevertheless, Pinnock (2006:14) agrees that the doctrine of inerrancy is tantamount to Docetism. Yet, once more confirming the battle over terminology, Pinnock (2006:259) wishes to maintain the term inerrancy, but only after the modification of its definition, "so as to take into account certain biblical phenomena not compatible with any absolute view of an errorless text". And so the argument against inerrancy extends to inductive difficulties. What must we make of "Semitic cosmology" and "variants of parallel material appearing in the Synoptic Gospels"; two of the difficulties that Pinnock (2006:259) notes? These are valid inquiries. Indeed, there are many more than two difficulties to be addressed.

Peter Enns (2013:115) continues similarly to Pinnock, although he wishes to do away with the term inerrancy altogether. Enns (2013:115) proposes instead an "incarnational metaphor" to the effect of highlighting the humanity of Christ as it points to the humanity of Scripture. The ensuing description of the metaphor conveys nonetheless a familiar concept: "Scripture is a collection of a variety of writings that *necessarily and unashamedly* reflects the worlds in which those writings were

[39] The convolution inherent to categories relative to the term *evangelical* again rears up with the caveat that "while some neo-evangelicals deny biblical inerrancy, others affirm it". Indeed, the very person who coined the term neo-evangelical, Harold Ockenga, is noted as an example of those in the camp who affirm inerrancy (Enns, 2014:1032).
[40] Pinnock (2006:259) notes Edward Farley and James Barr as his influencers to this perspective. However, the suggestion of inerrancy as a rationalistic doctrine was already implied by Barth (2004:529), who exhorts belief in the Word of God as containing the fallibility of human authors, thereby allowing greater appreciation of Scripture as something miraculous.
[41] As unpacked in the previous chapter, open theism imposes limitation on God while attempting to describe how divine will interact with human free will. Such a theology is incompatible with inerrancy since it makes room for the potential of inaccurate prophecies given by God, or for the potential for God to err assuming unknowability of the individualistic futures of humanity (cf. Rice, 2013:36).

produced" (Enns, 2013:115). A little further on we see again that Lewis' insights regarding human variability and predilection to error are used to bolster the metaphor (Enns, 2013:115). Additionally, Enns mounts an inductive polemic by means of three sample cases: contrasting archaeological data (Jericho) (Enns, 2013:93), apparent contradiction of statements within Acts (Enns, 2013:99), and incongruity between the Canaanite extermination in the Old Testament and the moral prescripts of the New Testament, alongside archaeological difficulties (Enns, 2013:104-105). Furthermore, Enns (2013:114) describes inerrancy in terms of schizophrenia: reflective of his scientific sympathies,[42] he frames evangelical inerrantists as generally embracive of science but dismissive of science whereupon it is believed to contradict Scripture.

The above scholars write from within Christian circles. To be sure, there are challenges to inerrancy outside Christian circles. Here, however, the opposition takes the form of questioning the reliability of Scripture broadly. The Jesus Seminar is a prime example; its founder, Robert Funk (1997:297), as part of what he calls a "new age" explains that "The scholarship of the Bible once belonged to the churches. It has now moved out into secular institutions and functions quite apart from, and in some respects in opposition to, the denominations". Furthermore, Funk (1997:298) postures the need for this "secular account of Christian faith … primarily for the sake of those who inhabit the contemporary, scientifically minded Western world". Regarding the latter, and similarly to Enns above, the tendency to dichotomise science and faith informed by Scripture is evident. Importantly, these concluding remarks are built on Funk's (1997:24) "Rule One" presupposition of the fallibility of humanity precluding the inerrancy of Scripture, alongside his pragmatic objection to entertaining a divinely inspired text which, he argues, is then rendered redundant by fallible interpretation proceeding necessarily from human fallibility (the relativisation of language and meaning derived from it is noted). Funk's (1997:20-21) primary aim is attempting to find the "real [or historical] Jesus" as opposed to the *legendary* accounts (Funk, 1997:19) offered in the Synoptic Gospels particularly, and Christian tradition. In establishing his case, Funk (1997:38, 144) posits the unreliability of information transmission through oral tradition to written record, with reference also to the convolution resultant of apocryphal accounts like the Gospel of Thomas. The latter culminates with the following inciting assertion: "*Declare the New Testament a highly uneven and biased record of various early attempts to invent Christianity*" (Funk, 1997:314).

Bart Ehrman has proven himself a front runner of Funk's charge. Ehrman (2014) admits: "on many of the very broad and most important issues about the historical Jesus I was/am in complete agreement with the seminar: we all agree that the Gospels contain numerous discrepancies,

[42] Enns (2012) has argued for the compatibility of evolution and creation.

contradictions, historical and implausibilities [*sic*]". Famed within his discipline of New Testament textual criticism, Ehrman takes this position after at one time holding firmly to inerrancy. Ehrman's (2005:9) admittance of mistakes in the Gospel of Mark of course led to the abandonment of inerrancy but, unlike Pinnock, culminated in the renouncement of his Christian faith to what he calls an atheist-agnostic position (cf. Ehrman, 2018). Ehrman (2005:9) explains that admitting a single mistake allowed the "floodgates" to open: "For if there could be one little, picayune mistake in Mark 2, maybe there could be other mistakes in other places as well". And this thought is facilitated by Ehrman's (2005:10) central emphasis regarding the New Testament manuscript tradition:

> we don't have the originals … we don't have the first copies of the originals … What we have are copies made later – much later … these copies differ from one another in so many places that we don't even know how many differences there are … there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.

Furthermore, Ehrman (2005:11; cf. pp. 14, 46, 56, 77, 90) suggests that such a manuscript tradition indicates a clear lack of preservation of the original text,[43] such that to speak of a divinely inspired text begs the question of why such a text is not also preserved. With Ehrman's focus upon inductive difficulties, his conclusion regarding Scripture's nature follows fittingly: "The Bible began to appear to me a very human book. Just as human scribes had copied, and changed, the texts of scripture, so too had human authors originally *written* the texts of scripture. This was a human book from beginning to end" (Ehrman, 2005:11). Unsurprisingly, human variability is again made the driving force of Scripture: "What is striking, once one sees them [the biblical authors] for the human beings they were, with their own beliefs, worldviews, situations, and so on, is that all these authors passed along the traditions they inherited in *different* words" (Ehrman, 2005:212). The only difference is that Ehrman (2005:9), true to his "floodgates" metaphor, does not retain any such buffer as the Word of God *within* Scripture. Ehrman's (2005:9, 14) presupposition progressed from "maybe Mark *did* make a mistake" to "What if God *didn't* say it? What if the book you take as giving you God's words instead contains human words?".

In summary, it appears that fundamental to the objection against inerrancy, or indeed to the notion of a divinely inspired text, is the acceptance of the popularised phrase, "to err is human" from the

[43] Similarly, Pinnock (2006:258) parenthetically includes, "the original text [is] no longer wholly available" as further qualification for his new-found position.

Latin “*errasse humanum est*”. [44] The oft declared phrase befits the idea that because error is integral to the human situation, extending to the very elements of language itself, God necessarily communicates complicit with error. We are told that accepting such a manner of God’s communicating is to accept the miraculous; the mystery with which God operates – so preserving in some way Scripture’s own witness to its divine inspiration. For others, it bolsters the assertion that Scripture is a purely human book. In both cases, the various inductive difficulties (intra- and extra-biblical) are forthwith highlighted as proof against inerrancy. Theologically speaking, if there is not an atheistic tendency, there is a deistic tendency, seen in liberalism and continuing in neo-orthodoxy, where God is not thought sufficiently immanent to inspire Scripture as his own words. Most recently, there is by the emphasis of human free will a tendency also to open theism, likewise incompatible with inerrancy. Therefore, with respect to both the human biblical authors and God there are ontological presuppositions made for a conclusion against inerrancy, supported with inductive difficulties. From this point on, we must consider an appropriate defence for inerrancy.

3.4 Defending inerrancy

With respect to the nature of the objections, defending inerrancy must take the form of engaging the presuppositions and inductive difficulties as elucidated above. The trajectory of the defence is described as follows. The defence is founded on deductive argument – here the epistemological nature of the topic shows itself – thereafter progressing from broader matters of biblical reliability to what is considered among the more difficult intra-biblical challenges to inerrancy. A review of the self-testimony of Scripture is the inevitable starting point of the deductive argument set forward. The incarnational model is also an important deductive consideration as it witnesses to certain ontological realities involving Scripture. Progressing from these foundational matters, considerations on biblical reliability is indispensable primarily because it involves the manuscript tradition of Scripture, which in turn involves the original text of Scripture. Relative to the latter, the question of canonisation and extra-biblical material have their place. Lastly, regarding specific difficulties[45] considered within Scripture, this is done rightly only with respect to hermeneutics and harmonisation as informed by exegesis.

[44] The human proclivity to error has long been articulated, variously worded particularly in the Latin; this construction originating with Jerome (Edlund-Berry, 2000:512).

[45] Scope does limit this study to a select sample of difficulties for engagement; it cannot be exhaustively inductive in approach.

3.4.1 The testimony of Scripture

Although this study disagrees with Barth's explication of the nature of revelation and the extent of the Word of God in Scripture, the presuppositional logic Barth employs regarding the Word of God as absolutely authoritative is appropriate to relay here. Barth (2004b:535) writes confidently: "That the Bible is the Word of God is not left to accident or to the course of history and to our own self-will, but to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the triune God as Him whose self-witness alone can and very definitely does see to it that this statement is true". This comes after Barth (2004b:534) specifically differentiates the objectivity of the Word of God from subjective attestation alone:

> To believe in the inspiration of the Bible means, because of and in accordance with its witness, to believe in the God whose witness it is … Certainly it is not our faith which makes the Bible the Word of God. But we cannot safeguard the objectivity of the truth that it is the Word of God better than by insisting that it does demand our faith, and underlie our faith, that it is the substance and life of our faith.

Likewise, and specifically concerning this study, "[the] acceptance of inerrancy is a presupposition" (Frame, 2014:37). With this study's apologetic set on deductive argument as its foundation, proceeding with respect to the above presuppositional understanding is prudent. This is because there is a presuppositional root to deductive argument. In other words, to put it in the context of what this study defends; it is in light of the testimony of Scripture, and its self-testimony, that the deductive argument for inerrancy takes shape. It is apt to qualify the presuppositional nature of deduction with reference to the previous chapter and the case made there for the existence of God, and the corresponding divine ontology, since that is what the deductive argument for inerrancy first invokes. Now, epistemological arguments are seen to invariably proceed from presupposition: there is always an appeal to something objective, or perceived as such, giving stability to the proceeding premises that complete the argument. Otherwise stated, arguments cannot begin from nowhere, reference to a given, or set of givens, is a necessary beginning. Consider, for example, something as integral to argument as reason. Though reason is integral it is yet inappropriate to presuppose reason as the absolute standard that grounds argument, since reason itself requires grounding in an objective, infinite mind. If one stops at reason the question "Why is reason dependable?" inevitably arises. The point is, reason is not abstract from God (God being infinite and thereby absolute), nor is it equivalent to God (God is not merely mind), so reason must proceed from God. This point is accentuated when we argue for something as *irreducible* as the causal agency of the universe, which is necessarily infinite, at which point God is the appropriate *given*, or "criterion of truth" (Frame, 2015:225).[46] As such, the biblical presupposition "in the beginning God" (Gen 1:1) is validated against atheistic conceptions of reality. The above then summarily reconveys not only the likelihood of God's existence, but his essential nature, with respect to which the argument for inerrancy is grounded. The deductive argument for inerrancy is then fittingly and justifiably presuppositional, and is presented here as follows:[47]

1. God, being infinite and thereby absolute, cannot err.
2. The original text of Scripture has been breathed out by God.
3. Therefore, the original text of Scripture cannot err.

This argument is amended from the classical argument that Geisler and Roach detail: "There are two premises clearly taught in Scripture: (1) God cannot err. (2) The original Bible is the Word of God. The necessary logical conclusion to draw from this is clear: (3) The original Bible cannot err" (2011:177). Certainly, that God cannot err pertains to the testimony of Scripture (Ps 18:30; Ezek 18:25; Num 23:19; Heb 6:18). However, as open theists would argue against this primary premise, it is to the benefit of the argument that the primary premise is reinforced by the inclusion of the ontological qualifier (*being infinite and thereby absolute*) which is demonstrated as logically necessary with reference to the physical universe, as well as from Scripture (Ps 147:5; 1 Kgs 8:27; Isa 43:13; Rev 1:8). The argument's presupposition of God remains intact, only supplemented with an implicit refutation of open theism. Now, there is something to be said regarding how the argument begins and the common objection of circularity, particularly as it is addressed by Geisler and Roach (2011:120-121). Geisler and Roach (2011:121) explain that "for the inerrantist position to succumb to circular reasoning as charged, it would have to claim that the Bible is inerrant because it claims to be inerrant. Rather, the inerrancy position is grounded in a deductive argument that is grounded in the essential nature of a perfect God, who cannot communicate error". The latter details are granted, but Geisler and Roach are still open to the accusation of circular reasoning, since in the context of their argument they reference *Scripture* as it witnesses to the perfection of God. The *circle* remains, it is only larger – that is, containing more presuppositional premises towards the conclusion. Importantly, however, according to the presuppositional method this is not a problem, rather it is inevitable and good (cf. Frame,

[46] Here again this study shows its allegiance to the Van Tillian-Framian presuppositional apologetic, which advocates the insufficiency of reason alone to establish argument and knowledge (cf. Frame, 2015:222-228). Arguing for inerrancy in this manner is noted to overlap fideism, but not with any detriment to the argument for inerrancy, rather to the contrary (cf. Helm, 1992:309). However, the presuppositional apologetic does not advocate a dichotomy between reason and faith as in some expressions of fideism. Reference to the previous chapter's combination argument, involving the cosmological and ontological deductive arguments for God's existence, also serves the point.

[47] Notably, the deductive argument for inerrancy does not concern itself with historical reliability. Proceeding simply from the reasonability of the existence of a God of particular nature is sufficient to reach its conclusion. Beginning a defence for inerrancy with this argument then shows departure from Warfield and Hodge (2015:8): "we should first establish theism, *then the historical credibility of the Scriptures*, and then the divine origin of Christianity" (emphasis added).

2015:228). Psillos (2011:25) explains poignantly:[48] "There is an obvious sense in which all deductive arguments are such that the conclusion is 'contained' in the premises – and this grounds/explains their logical validity. Hence, deductive arguments can be circular without being *viciously*[49] circular". Likewise, according to Frame (2015:228) the distinction is between "'broad circles'" (one might call this standard circularity) and "'narrow circles'" (vicious circularity). The example of a circular argument that Geisler and Roach present is *viciously* circular or *narrowly* circular; such are rightly avoided. Nevertheless, the presuppositional nature of deduction is again substantiated.

With the initial premise logically validated, we move on to the second premise, which concerns an action of God as it corresponds to his essential nature stated in the initial premise. The action in question is the production of Scripture which, as a product of the unerring divine will, is necessarily errorless. This action is particularised as *divine inspiration* which, as witnessed to in 2 Timothy 3:16, has several important details. At this point, we must briefly revisit divine inspiration as defined by this study above. Recalling the exegetical analysis of 2 Timothy 3:16 above, it was noted that this verse is the central witness to divine inspiration. Specifically, regarding the grammatical details, it was noted that the term *θεόπνευστος*, (God-breathed; inspired of God) is unique and technical, and that these grammatical attributes assist in the determination of what the preceding phrase *πᾶσα γραφὴ* (all Scripture) means. To emphasise, *γραφὴ* (Scripture) is employed in the context as a proper noun; it is never used anarthrously within Scripture (referring to itself) (cf. House, 1980:56). The more likely meaning is a definite corpus of literature, at least encompassing the Old Testament, and implicitly the New (to refer once more to the noted canonical intent[50] of the construction [cf. Wall & Steele, 2012:485-486]). The two (*γραφὴ θεόπνευστος*), proper noun and technical adjective, together in immediate context highlight the unlikelihood that the witness to divine inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16 pertains to unquantified segmentary portions in Scripture. Given the unlikelihood, the burden of proof is upon neo-orthodox conceptions of Scripture as the Word of God *partially* represented. The elusiveness inherent to some such unquantified corpus of verses does not comport well with the identification afforded by a proper noun – that it must be a corpus is also understood from *πᾶσα* (all). Therefore, these grammatical details validate the

[48] A digressional note is made here due to the unseemly context within which this quote appears; namely in the development of the case for the "no miracles argument" by means of the reliability of the scientific methodology "inference to the best explanation" (Psillos, 2011:23). Interestingly, however, Meyer (2009:456-460) writing also within philosophy of science uses the same methodology to explain that the informational properties of micro-biology are best explained by inferring a transcendent mind. Nevertheless, the quote in question conveys epistemological truth universal to philosophical disciplines.

[49] Vicious circularity is defined comprehensively enough by Psillos (2011:25) as an argument that "has no epistemic force" – that is, "It cannot offer reasons to believe the conclusion"; with the example, "if Socrates is mortal, then Socrates is mortal; Socrates is mortal; therefore Socrates is mortal".

[50] More is said further on regarding the Protestant canon of Scripture (which this study takes as Scripture) as it relates to the historical reliability of Scripture.

second premise of the argument as one in service to the conclusion of inerrancy. Now, the second premise has an important qualifier: while Scripture is the embodiment of the unique action of divine inspiration, the action itself applies only to the *original text*[51] – not to modern translations, nor ancient manuscripts – with the unique divine action in turn producing something unique. The specificity garnered from 2 Timothy 3:16 is then double-edged: from it is proven no discrimination between verses of Scripture and their standing as divinely inspired (plenary verbal inspiration), but also proven by it is the discrimination between the original text of Scripture and copies of it. The latter statement is further demonstrated by Scripture's witness to the *mode* of divine inspiration. We identified earlier 2 Peter 1:20-21 as another pillar passage to the doctrine of inspiration; furthermore, providing a fuller sense of what the action of divine inspiration involved. We may summarise the earlier engagement of this passage here as follows. The involvement of both human authors and the Spirit in the production of Scripture is obvious, but since divine "superintendence" (Warfield & Hodge, 2015:17) (or, as is the preference of this study, initiative) is explicit in the passage (and in parallel passages: Exod 4:11-12; 2 Sam 23:2; Jer 1:9), the role of the Spirit is necessarily stressed as primary. However, with respect to the features of Scripture (genres and literary style, for example), the variability observed thereof, while continuously initiated by the Spirit, nevertheless reflects the humanity of Scripture. What we have then is, in every aspect of Scripture, the role of the Spirit as *active*, and the human author as *passive*. Digressing for a moment to defend this notion of passivity and activity together forming one product (Scripture), there is an appropriate analogy. A musical instrument in the hands of a musician is entirely passive, yet from the instrument is produced music unique to that instrument. The initiative of the musician is clear, but just as clear is the *peculiarity* of the instrument. In the same way, the human authors of Scripture are made passive by the initiative of the Spirit, yet producing text somewhat unique compared with each respective biblical author. Back to the point then: the mode of inspiration is, by the features of Scripture, undeniably multifaceted; certainly more dynamic than mere divine dictation – although it too has its place. Therefore, divine *initiative* is preferred over divine *superintendence*, as it comports better in describing an action that is evidently dynamic and creative. However, it is inevitably acknowledged – just as any metaphor at some point breaks down – precisely *how* the divine will is imposed as described is undivulged in Scripture, and remains enigmatic. So, article 7 of the CSBI (1978:3) (cf. Carson, 2010:32) justifiably affirms: "The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us". Certainly, however, we know enough from Scripture about the mode of inspiration to know that it discredits deistic conceptions of God's

[51] Adhering to orthodox confession as demonstrated in article 6 of the CSBI (1978:3): "We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration". However, this does not mean that the original words have not been *preserved*. There is more said on this matter further on as it relates to the historical reliability of Scripture; specifically, the accessibility of the original text in the manuscript tradition.

relationship to humanity. To the extreme contrary, what Scripture implies by inspiration is divine immanence to an extent inconceivable.

If indeed *θεόπνευστος* (God-breathed) represents a divine action upon human authors that is primary to the writing of Scripture, and that a definite corpus of writing resulted, then the conclusion that that corpus of writing is inerrant is justified. Such is the conclusion of the deductive argument for inerrancy. Importantly, since inerrancy and inspiration are two matters hand-in-glove, the qualification that inerrancy applies only to the original text is likewise necessary. At this point there is value in revisiting Warfield and Hodge's (2015:17) definition of inspiration. Within their definition is, essentially, the conclusion of the deductive argument for inerrancy, but phrased teleologically: "with the design and effect of rendering that writing an errorless record of the matters he designed them to communicate". The purpose of divine inspiration is an important point. As Warfield and Hodge (2015:42) later explicitly state: "We do not erect inspiration into an end, but hold it to be simply a means to an end – viz. the accurate conveyance of truth". It is a matter quite logical, not merely confessional, that there is no purpose which merits divine inspiration except the certainty of consistent truthfulness, thereby infallibly grounding the communication. And one is indeed restrained by the context of 2 Timothy 3:16 from suggesting that inspiration was purposed to provide divine perspective on only *some* of what Scripture communicates. The very passages (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21) that alert the reader to such a thing as divine inspiration testify to its all-encompassing extent; that divine inspiration is the primary substance of Scripture. To clarify regarding Scripture's *communication*, what is meant, specifically, is what Scripture *teaches*, its propositions. Hence the qualification in the short statement of the CSBI (1978:2): "Scripture is without error or fault *in all its teaching*" (emphasis added). Certainly, not every statement in Scripture is propositional, but each narrative, for example, contains propositions; the so termed *moral of the story*, and history in the story, that is taught. The latter is evidently misunderstood even in confessional evangelical circles, since Geisler and Roach (2011:140) critique Kevin Vanhoozer (a noteworthy evangelical scholar) on the matter: "He does not acknowledge the vast amount of propositional truth implied in nonpropositional language". Thereafter, Geisler and Roach (2011:142) assert that "Though not all truth claims in the Bible are in propositional form (many are in stories and parables), nonetheless all truth in the Bible is propositionalizable". So, the doctrine of inerrancy rightly applies only to the propositions of Scripture, and is in this sense *unlimited*; i.e., for every proposition of Scripture there are no errors. Whatever is taught is ultimately either correct or incorrect. Should God position Himself to teach, all that He teaches is necessarily correct in accordance with his nature. This matter of absolutely truthful teaching is consistent with the context of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which describes the result of divine inspiration as a written record that acts as a *referential standard* by which one tests one's life and doctrine. This is the point: what Scripture teaches is to that extent the absolute standard of truth; it is not to say that Scripture teaches exhaustively on every subject. There is the common (neo-orthodox) objection that the context (2 Tim 3:16-17) permits an absolute standard of truthfulness only so far as the propositions concern the faith. But this is to overlook two fundamental things: 1) the fact that Scripture contains propositions outside of what directly teaches the faith; [52] and 2) God as the primary author of Scripture necessarily applies his nature to propositions teaching the faith *and* propositions teaching otherwise. Therefore, Scripture both cannot err by virtue of God's nature, and is purposed not to err for the sake of its application, namely teaching, prescriptively, proscriptively and informationally as a referential standard. Surely, then, Scripture variously testifying to the Word of God as faultless (Ps 119:160; Prov 30:5-6; John 17:17) is its testimony of its own nature.

Jesus' statements regarding Scripture are another important consideration. Evidently, out of the biblical authors' contribution to Scripture, Scripture's self-testimony is established. Now, considering the person of Jesus – the Son of God, as such greater than any prophet, and to whom the prophets point (Heb 3:3) – His testimony is of central importance. And Jesus likewise testifies to the errorless and absolutely authoritative nature of Scripture: "Scripture cannot be broken"[53] (John 10:35), He qualifies in his discourse; and similarly, "the Scripture will be fulfilled" (John 13:18, cf. 15:25, 17:12). Furthermore, He verifies the absolute standing of Scripture in a manner very personal, by referencing Himself as its fulfilment: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39; cf. Luke 4:21). It is mistaken to suggest that Jesus is here diminishing the study of Scripture, for elsewhere He chastens those who do not know well enough what it teaches: "'You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt 22:29). The indicative sense

[52] For example, propositions historical and scientific. A distinction might be made in terms of significance between these propositions and propositions that directly inform the faith. Historical and scientific propositions are necessary as they lead to and serve the more important faith propositions, i.e., they may indirectly teach the faith (cf. Rom 1:20). There is no *a priori* prohibition, save precarious macro-evolutionary notions, precluding the propositions in the creation narrative of Genesis 1 from being both scientifically true and indirectly informative of the nature of God at once. As Lennox (2011b:164) explains: the instances of divine intervention for specific creations conveyed in Genesis 1 may as well be "singularities", as such bearing no inconsistency with science; scientific observations having led to the description of the beginning of the universe as a singularity – that fact itself according with Genesis. Likewise, the human history recorded in Scripture serves to lead to and highlight the gospel agenda. To call into question the historicity of an archetype and the recorded events surrounding that archetype is ultimately to call into question that to which the archetype points.

[53] Grudem (1992:50) notes that "Jesus is here making a statement about 'Scripture' in general". Similarly, Lange and Schaff (2008:334) find consensus with Meyer that the passage bears "'the idea of the unity of the Scriptures'", importantly adding that the passage "is founded on the inspiration of the sacred writings"; furthermore that "Inspiration is undoubtedly modifiable, though not by the distinction of important and "'unimportant'" words. Such is demonstrably true by Jesus' discourse on the identity of the Messiah (Matt 22:42-46), wherein Jesus' opposers, faced with the *apparent* contradiction of David calling his son "Lord" (Ps 110:1), are silenced. Of course, Jesus acknowledges that David spoke "in the Spirit", and the apparent contradiction is nullified with understanding of the nature of Jesus applied to Psalm 110:1.

of John 5:39 is noted by Lange and Schaff (2008:195) over against an imperative sense (a command to search Scripture strains the context, though it has been suggested). Regardless of the indicative sense, it is noted furthermore that Jesus means to expose the "inconsistency" of their (Jewish religious leaders) diligent study; He acknowledges their scrutiny over minor details, and simultaneously highlights their failure to apprehend the main point – Jesus Himself (Lange & Schaff, 2008:195). There is a parallel (Luke 11:42; cf. Isa 58:6) in Jesus decrying the fastidiousness of the Pharisees' tithing while lacking the heart of the matter: "justice and the love of God"; nevertheless, "You should have practised the latter without leaving the former [tithing] undone". Indeed, it is proper to suggest that Jesus here (John 5:39) thinks of Scripture as a means to an end, but certainly not an *optional* or *insignificant* means to the end; insignificant only upon failing to arrive at the end for which it is designed. Jesus' petition and attestation remains: "Sanctify them by the truth; Your word [*λόγος*] is truth" (John 17:17). The predicative description (*ἐστιν ἀλήθειά*; "is truth") is authoritative compared with the articular description (*ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθειά*; "is the truth"), with reference to the manuscript tradition; the construction thus establishing the interpretation that "The word of God is, in the abstract, pure truth" (Lange & Schaff, 2008:520). Henry (1994:2032) describes the meaning of this latter half of John 17:17 in an eloquent manner: "Divine revelation, as it now stands in the written word, is not only pure truth without mixture, but entire truth without deficiency". As if to confirm once more the overlap between Scripture and Himself, Jesus declares Himself the embodiment of truth (John 14:6, 17:19). Elsewhere (John 15:3) attesting, "You are already clean [to parallel sanctify] because of the word [*λόγος*] I have spoken to you"; and, "if you abide in me, and my words [*ῥήματά*] abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7; cf. Isa 66:2b; 1 Peter 3:10-12). The latter two verses facilitate the discussion of yet more important overlaps in Jesus' discourse. There is an overlap between *λόγος* (word) (John 15:3) and *ῥήματά* (words) (John 15:7), demonstrable from the broader context of John 14 and 15. "'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word [*λόγον*], and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words [*λόγους*]. And the word [*λόγος*] that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (John 14:23-24). The latter passage fits within the chiastic structure of John 14: 1-31. From this context is proven the intentioned overlaps between *λόγος* (word) and *ῥήματά* (words). But the overlap extends to *ἐντολάς* (commandments). In 14:21, if Jesus' "commandments" (*ἐντολάς*) are kept, a disciple's love for Jesus is thereby proven; likewise, in 14:23 if his "word" is kept, love for Him is thereby proven. Jesus' commandments in this context are as one word by their unity – befitting the understanding of the Word of God as a unified corpus of revealed truth (cf. Matt 22:40). The *abiding* motif as found alongside *ῥήματά* (words) in 15:7 is also present in 14:23: "'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word [*λόγον*], and my Father will love him, and *we will come to him and make our home with him*" (emphasis added); 15:10 makes the overlap clear: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love". If there is any doubt as to whether Jesus in this discourse personalises the Word of God, it must be allayed in view of the "new commandment" He pronounces, building upon God's commandments (John 13:34; 15:12). Evidently, Jesus positions his teaching as fresh revelation from God, which should come as no surprise on the back of affirmations of Jesus' divinity (John 1:1; cf. John 14:1; Matt 26:64; Luke 22:70); being God defaults the similitude of Jesus' words as God's words. What is of principal interest is not that Jesus disseminates this fresh word of God, but that it comes with a promise (John 14:26; 15:26-27) alluding to the New Testament as the sum of this fresh word of God, as such also unified. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (14:26); "the Spirit of truth … will bear witness about me. And you will also bear witness about me" (15:26-27; cf. Eph.3:2-5). Henry (1994:2021) comments on 15:26-27 implying the process of divine inspiration: "effectual provision was made for supporting it [the gospel], both by the principal testimony of the Spirit (v.26), and the subordinate testimony of the apostles (v.27)". And with reference to 14:26-27, Michaels (2010:82) points out the straight-forward implication of the verse given its context: "No distinction between theological truth and historical truth is evident. If the Advocate guarantees the former, the testimony of those who were with Jesus 'from the beginning' guarantees the latter". Such is also the natural implication after a plain reading of "all things" which the Spirit is said to "teach" and "bring to … remembrance", as Michaels (2010:1002) emphasises. Therefore, it is a credible suggestion, at least, that Jesus commissioned and so endorsed the writings of the New Testament which would follow as writings of equal standing to Scripture at that point in history; as such, a corpus of writing equally emanating from the Spirit of truth through human authors.[54]

In summary, as evidenced in the above statements, Jesus clearly understands Scripture as a corpus of literature (historically, the Old Testament) unified as the Word of God, which He in turn understands to be the absolute standard of truth. More radically, He personalises Scripture and proceeds to build upon it while maintaining this self-understanding; speaking only what He hears the Father say, his word as such the Father's word (John 12:49; cf. 15:15) (the written Word emanating from the living Word, if you will). And aside from the intimated New Testament with its equivalent standing, to suggest after Jesus presents his understanding of Scripture as the absolute standard of truth that He does not thereby mean the inerrancy of Scripture is surely intolerable.

It is in light of the chief importance of Jesus to Christian doctrine that the CSBI (1978:8) bases its first article of affirmation on his statements about Scripture: "We affirm that the normative authority

[54] The extent of this corpus pertains to the process involved in the determination of the canon of Scripture, which is engaged below as a historical matter. For the moment, the more general point is that a subsequent corpus to Old Testament Scripture, whatever its extent, is endorsed by Jesus as of equivalent standing.

of Holy Scripture is the authority of God Himself, and is attested by Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church". It is therefore fitting that, maintaining the given statements of Jesus about Scripture, a corollary argument to the above deductive argument for inerrancy is formed. Bowman's (2015) formal version is presented as follows:

Premise 1: All of the teachings of Jesus Christ are true.

Premise 2: That Scripture is inerrant is one of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Therefore, that Scripture is inerrant is true.

3.4.2 Incarnation, accommodation, and the humanness of Scripture

There is more to be said on Jesus' relationship to Scripture, particularly with respect to his unique ontology. It is the conviction of this study, along with scholarship for and against inerrancy, that accurately understanding the nature of Jesus assists the accurate understanding of Scripture's nature. Indeed, Jesus' statements about Scripture point to such a conclusion. Fundamentally, on account of its testimony, Scripture is necessarily the product of two natures in concert: the divine and human; likewise exemplified in Jesus. Thus far we have predominately expounded the nature of Scripture with respect to its divine component, as such inevitably leading to Jesus. It is proper also to explore the human component of Scripture, no less leading to Jesus but therewith also to the matter of the proper relationship of human nature to error. The doctrines of *incarnation* and *accommodation* are central to the discourse at this juncture because they afford expansion on the parallel between Jesus and Scripture on the human level. We proceed with an overview of the incarnation, linking into the implications for human nature and divine accommodation.

By the divinity of Jesus is established that He perfectly represented God (John 1:1; 5:19; 12:49). Now, the incarnation witnesses to the divine nature of Jesus, but likewise understood by the incarnation is that it is the only way possible for Jesus to simultaneously represent human nature perfectly. The hypostatic union is the result, thereby initiating Jesus' role as Messiah (Heb 2:14-18; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 1:7). Reymond (2013:2575) describes the union poignantly: "without ceasing to be what he is, God the Son, took into union with himself what he before that act did not possess, a human nature". There is something of particular importance to note concerning the process of the incarnation: The Spirit, through whom the incarnation is achieved (Luke 1:35), nullifies the need for an earthly father. This operation is of significance to human ontology because sin is promulgated through the seed of Adam, and, logically, the absence of sin would have implications for human ontology (cf. Rom 5:19). The important question is: Why does a sinless human perfectly represent human nature if sin is fundamental to the natural promulgation of humanity? This question is necessarily answered with reference to the *imago Dei* (Gen 1:26), within the context of the creation and fall narrative (Gen 1-3), as discussed in the previous chapter. From the biblical perspective, the *imago* is the created essence of humanity, and therefore integral to defining the intrinsic nature of humanity. Importantly, sin is not included in the constitution of the *imago*, as sin is described as something external entering into the human situation (Rom 5:12) with the consequence of the fall; the fall in turn manifest in physical and spiritual death, and alienation from God, to whom the *imago* corresponds (Gen 3:14-19). Therefore, as it was noted in the previous chapter, based on the gravity of these post-fall conditions – weighing on humanity's intrinsic nature – the impact upon the *imago* is defaulted; not to its oblivion, but at least to its fracturing, the extent of which as unknown as the extent of the *imago* itself. Given the context (Gen 1-3), then, sin is extrinsic to the *imago* but impacts the *imago*. Sin is as a fracture reaching down through the generations, but sin itself remains essentially foreign to the *imago*. It follows that for Jesus to perfectly represent humanity, his sinlessness is necessary and, furthermore, necessarily maintained even with sin as an extrinsic possibility (only for the human nature of his person [cf. Jas 1:13]) facilitated by temptation (Heb 4:15). It is important to clarify that the ability of the *imago* to sin communicates not that sin itself is somehow intrinsic, but rather that limitation is intrinsic, engendering weakness – contingency being inevitable for all things created, for that reason being limited and weak. It is therefore understandable why Hebrews 4:15 describes Jesus' temptation in terms of empathetic *weakness*.

What about *error* as it relates to human nature? While it is noted that "there is a world of difference between sin and error" (Wetzel, 2013:41), there is arguably a point of intersection. Both sin and error are made possible by limitation. For example: the potential for sin engendered by the weakness experienced in temptation; the potential for error engendered by fatigue and/or ignorance. By extension, in the fall narrative, there is a noticeable symbiosis between sin and error. The external misrepresentation of God's command (the absolute standard of truth) by the serpent (Gen 3:1-4), facilitated the temptation to disobey the command, which resulted in sin. Therefore, the biblical account implies that error, like sin, is extrinsic to the *imago*. What one is required to hold in tension is that Genesis presents a record of the first human error (believing eating the fruit would make one like God) with the first human sin (disobeying the command not to eat the fruit). One can speculate about benign errors Adam and Eve may have made before the fall, but such remains speculation peripheral to the biblical account. That abiding with God in the garden may have prevented lesser errors of judgment and praxis is a juxtapositional speculation, where the weaknesses inherent to the limited (*imago*) were placed in check so far as there remained full dependence upon the unlimited (God). Post-fall, however, heightened proclivity to error due to sin's fracturing effect on the *imago* follows as probable. That is to say, the distortion prevalent in the fallen *imago*, fractured as it is by sin, facilitates increased error – this highlights the symbiosis once more. However, even though sin impacts as extensively as it does on the *imago*, this does not necessitate humans performing sinfully – or indeed erroneously – all the time (Gen 4:7; Gen 5:24; 2 Kgs 18:3; 2 Chr 31:20), although there is the potential for that extreme (Gen 6:5). As discussed in the previous chapter, something fractured may in areas be more whole than in others. A broken mirror may still have the capacity for accurate reflection in some areas. In the case of the fallen *imago*, it is indeed always in some way fractured, variously so across humanity, but with some people in aspects more accurately reflecting the divine than others. The saying "to err is human" has been restated even more strongly by Vawter (1972:169), rhetorising that "nothing is more human than to err". But, biblically, this is simply untrue; nothing is more human than to be divine image bearers. In a manner yet more axiomatic, Geisler and Roach (2011:122, 312, 329) frequently explain that human action is not *necessarily* erroneous; "there are inerrant exams, phone books, and letters". As such, the saying "to err is human" is more sensibly phrased as "the *potential* to err is human". Notably, then, the simple deductive argument against inerrancy, as follows, is challenged at its foundational premise:

1. To err is human.
2. The Bible is a human book.
3. Therefore, the Bible is errant.

We must also consider the relationship of error to the incarnate Jesus, and so too the doctrine of divine accommodation, closely tied as it is. To motivate that Jesus despite being the perfect representation of the *imago* and the very embodiment of truth nevertheless erred (or, accommodated to error), is anathema. No doubt, Jesus expressed limitation and the inferiority of his human nature compared to the Father (John 12:49; 14:28), but the context of the expressed limitation includes the expression of unending dependence on the Father, down to every word and action (John 5:19). So, just as Jesus in weakness could potentially have sinned but did not, so too He could potentially have erred but did not – the key to both instances is unending dependence. Critiquing Kenton Sparks, an advocate of the notion that Jesus erred,[55] Geisler and Roach (2011:123) explain that what ensues is an "accommodationist view [that creates] a christological crisis". Indeed, as accommodation is applied to Jesus, there is a risk of ontological contradiction, due to how comprehensively Jesus spoke about his relationship to the truth. But beyond this most

[55] John Franke and Peter Enns (2013:268, 293) are also agreed on an accommodationist view of Jesus that implies not simply that Jesus accommodated to cultural paradigms for his teaching, but that his teaching accommodated to the extent of embracing errors in the cultural paradigms, so as to render the teaching effective to the ancient mind (cf. Enns, 2012:153). They put forward this notion with the chief example of the limitation of language. However, both Enns and Franke mistake the limitation of language for necessary error in language.

fundamental contradiction, the matter of whether or not Jesus erred becomes climactic when faced with Jesus' explicit teaching on the nature of Scripture. A choice must then be made. Either, following the above deductive argument against inerrancy with its presuppositions, one believes Jesus taught the nature of Scripture incorrectly, and accommodated to error to become effective to the ancient mind; or one believes Jesus taught correctly, and that there is consequently more to understand about human nature at least. The ramifications of choosing the former are severe. Jesus' teaching that Scripture is the absolute standard of truth if it is not, and affirming fables as historical details if they are not, would not constitute trivial error. As Geisler and Roach (2011:123) declare: "This would be divine deception". Regardless of the error in question, the very notion of accommodating to error implies *wilful* error, and so more than error, it is sin. That is anathema!

The discussion over Jesus' accommodation naturally leads to the consideration of accommodation more broadly, as it concerns the whole of Scripture. If one holds that Jesus accommodated to error, the redundancy of his teaching follows; it "practically nullifies Christ's authority on critical questions" (Broomall, 2013:138). To be clear, the "accommodation" (accommodation to error) so far described is a variant of orthodox accommodation, [56] and is aptly labeled "extreme" (Geisler & Roach, 2011:124); rather "an accommodation to liberalism" (Enns, 2014:1113). It proves self-contradictory not only with respect to the nature of Jesus and his statements, but self-defeating with respect to the very function (effectiveness to the ancient mind) it claims to facilitate in the whole of Scripture. As Grudem (1992:55) elucidates: "If it was necessary for God to give incidental affirmation to human error in order to communicate effectively, then *all* of Scripture where there is 'effective communication' is necessarily tainted with error". The essence of the logic here is that, that which is erroneous is most effective at communicating truth. How else should one comment except to highlight the non-logic that accommodation to error should be anywhere operative in Scripture? Rightly, "It is impossible to hold that the writers [Old and New Testament] used false information and yet taught correct doctrine" (Enns, 2014:1113). By extension, considering language, that most fundamental to comprehensive communication, if held as a *necessarily* errant medium, it is as such impossible to teach truth by it.

At this point it is necessary to clarify the proper place of accommodation. Within proper parameters accommodation is certainly purposed to effectuate human understanding. Both the incarnation and Scripture are themselves, broadly speaking, divine accommodations to the human situation. Orthodox accommodation, referring to Scripture, is defined as follows: "The theological term that

[56] Calvin, believed to have carried Augustine's baton on the matter of accommodation after him, is noted as an integral point of reference to the orthodox doctrine of accommodation; whereas the idea of God accommodating to error is seen as early as Calvin's contemporary, Faustus Socinus (Lee, 2017:3-4).

designates that characteristic of biblical writers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for purposes of simplification, to adjust their language to the limitations of their readers without compromising the truth in the process" (Broomall, 2013:138). And, as discussed, the incarnation by definition involves the divine embodying of all that is native to human limitation. Clearly, in the orthodox view, both Jesus and Scripture accommodate to limitation, not error; to "human *finitude*" and not to "human *fallenness*" (Geisler & Roach, 2011:124). The above ontological distinctions have become all the more necessary to qualify that truth is not compromised in the process of Scripture's accommodating to limitation, nor by Jesus so accommodating. But having narrowed the matter down to the essential overlap – that both Jesus and Scripture accommodate human limitation – it points in the direction of a long-standing observation: the parallel between Scripture and Jesus, in general. The observation finds its expression in the *incarnational analogy* of Scripture. In fact, Enns (2015:27) has made it the foundation of his Scripture principle, at times referring to the "incarnational metaphor" (Enns, 2013:115), and elsewhere arguing that it is better worded as the "'incarnational model'" or "'parallel'" of Scripture; attempting to make clear that the hypostatic union is exclusive to Jesus (Enns, 2015:285). It is true that Jesus embodies the divine in a way Scripture cannot (Scripture is not God), but it is also true that Jesus embodies humanity in a way Scripture cannot (Scripture is not a human). In the effort to highlight the humanness of Scripture the latter half of the latter qualification is not so much emphasised. Indeed, since the hypostatic union is realised through the incarnation, it is exceedingly important to give equal expansion and emphasis to the two natures, divine and human, as one person. Carson (2010:268) has rightly criticised Enns' incarnational model for offering "no discussion whatsoever of what the doctrine of the incarnation actually looks like"; that it is as such "disturbingly inadequate" and "seriously slanted". The omission is especially problematic given how Enns (2015:265) draws attention to the fact that "the incarnation of Christ is itself precisely what needs explaining". Carson (2010:268) decries Enns' slant as an over-emphasis of the actual humanity of Jesus entailed in the incarnation, applied to Scripture by analogy towards the "abolition of a kind of scriptural docetism", forgetting the application of the incarnation just as well against Arianism (the denial of Jesus' divinity). Carson (2010:268) furthermore suggests that when following the incarnational analogy faithfully, the question "In what sense is the Bible *God's* word, or … a collection of *God's words*?" is inevitable. It is not sufficient, as Enns (2015:88) appears to have done, to speak of the divinity of the incarnate Jesus only in terms of his condescension. Jesus manifested his transcendence too, extending into his teaching. The parables of Jesus (Mark 4:9-13), for example, are not purposed for cultural sensitivity, but for confounding; they are as thoughts higher than human thoughts. It is true to the nature of Scripture that some revelation, though disclosed, is inapprehensible for a time (cf. Dan 12:8-9).[57] And such is fitting of God's communicated perspective which, as simultaneously immanent and transcendent, is not merely *in* human history, but *over* it (cf. Luke 18:34, 21:33).

Since the incarnational analogy is not founded on exactitude between the nature of Scripture and the nature of Jesus, the analogy is rather a lens that brings into focus the principal reality that in both cases (Scripture and the incarnation) the divine and the human coalesce for a singular manifestation: on the one hand, a literary corpus (Scripture) and on the other, a person (Jesus). Scripture, as a literary corpus has categorical confines that are unique to the nature of a literary corpus, the embodiment of written characters, for example. But the capacity for language and writing is true to the nature of the divine and human. So far as both natures are applied to the category of written language, they cannot contradict their own nature in doing so. And as noted, lack of error is not contradictory to human nature, but the notion of error in a God-breathed product is contradictory to the nature of God. *Exactly* how the natures coalesce to form Scripture (the various faculties of both natures involved, and needed mechanisms) pertains to the mystery of the mode of inspiration.[58] Similarly, *exactly* how the *fullness* of divine nature and the *fullness* of human nature achieve hypostatic union is a mystery. But it is axiomatic that contradiction of nature cannot be part of the mode of inspiration, just as it cannot be part of the hypostatic union – for a contradiction of nature involves intrinsic contradiction, which cannot be applied to creative effect (cf. Copleston, 1965:369).

Granted that to err is not necessarily human, but that the *potential* for error is inherent to humanity, what are the implications for one's understanding of the humanness of Scripture? After all, Scripture is a lot more multifarious than a "phone book" or "exam", and as such there is greater possibility for human error to be realised. Answering the question leads to another deductive argument against inerrancy that is important to address for its nuances. Geisler and Roach (2011:273) outline this "more subtle" argument as follows:

1. The Bible is a thoroughly human book.

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[57] Commenting on the passage in Daniel, Lange *et al*. (2008d:266) emphasise that "their hidden condition [the revealed words] … is designed to *encourage and to lead to humble submission to the Divine guidance, whose purposes cannot at first be understood*".

[58] As such there is disagreement with Enns (2015:290) about *how* Scripture is mysterious. The mystery is not in how God condescends to accommodate error; or how He uses as *his* word the errors of myth to communicate truth (cf. Pinnock, 2010:149) – that is not mystery, it is contradiction. The mystery is in how God condescends to guide human authors within their limited context, all the while remaining transcendent throughout the production of Scripture. This doctrine of accommodation to error is subtle in its misapplication of the immanence of God – hiding behind assumed cultural need. Warfield and Hodge (2015:9) long ago highlighted such misapplication as presenting no trivial danger: "The only really dangerous opposition to the Church doctrine of inspiration comes either directly or indirectly, but always ultimately, from some false view of God's relation to the world". The danger is all the more pertinent today.

2. Human beings can err.
3. Therefore, the Bible can err.
4. But a book that can err is not infallible (by definition, 'infallible' means to be incapable of erring).
5. Hence, the Bible is not infallible (i.e. incapable of error).

Geisler and Roach (2011:274) concede that the above argument is "partially correct", referring to the human nature of Jesus as limited and that Jesus was in turn capable of sinning; furthermore, recognising that the possibility for error extends to Scripture on account of *its* humanness. However, Geisler and Roach (2011:274) qualify the concession by summing the argument as "seriously misdirected", since "the Bible is also the words of God, who cannot err". Therefore, Geisler and Roach (2011:274) offer the following reformulation in response to the above deductive objection:

1. God cannot err.
2. The Bible is God's Word.
3. Hence, insofar as the Bible is God's Word, it cannot err.
4. But the Bible is also human words.
5. Hence, insofar as the Bible is human words, it *can err* (but did not).

The force of this reformulation comes with an appeal to the intricacies of the law of non-contradiction; that it "is only violated if one affirms and denies the same thing at the same time (which is being done here) *and in the same relationship* (which is not being done here)" (Geisler & Roach, 2011:274-275). Very well, but the argument could have greater force if there was also an explicit appeal to the *superiority* of the divine nature compared to the human nature, and the consequent human dependence upon the divine. Just as there is no contradiction in speaking of the superiority of the divine nature over Jesus' human nature (John 14:28), there is likewise no contradiction in such qualitative distinction between the divine and human natures in the production of Scripture. And with the acknowledgement of the superiority of the divine comes the acknowledgment of dependence on the divine (John 5:19, 30). Therefore, acknowledging the superiority of the divine nature is practical for the emphasis of two things: 1) that divine initiative is primary to divine inspiration, and 2) that God remains transcendent at the same time as He is immanent in the act of inspiration. Both realities demonstrate God as One who is necessarily depended upon as He inspires Scripture. The complete dependence of human authors on God for inspiration is indeed the biblical witness (2 Pet 1:20-21). This dependence on the superior (divine) nature *should* logically annul the likelihood of weakness engendering error (within the confines of the inspiration of Scripture), [59] precisely because error is contradictory to the superior nature in question (Num 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18). It follows that the purpose of divine accommodation is not *simply* that the superior nature should condescend to the inferior (human) nature, but that the superior nature should in condescending simultaneously lift the inferior nature to higher standing.

3.4.3 The historicity of Scripture

While the first-order determinant of biblical reliability is the sovereignty of God, the reliability of Scripture is also derived from its unique manifestation in human history. And, historically speaking, Scripture is a remarkably reliable literary corpus – so much so that it is *uniquely* reliable comparative to other ancient historical records.[60] But it is precisely this that needs stressing: the sovereignty of God and his intervention in human history are not mutually exclusive. Scripture's historical uniqueness is confirmatory of its unique initiation by the will of a sovereign God. One should at the very least expect to see a historically reliable literary corpus following its divine initiation in human history. A demonstration of the historical reliability of Scripture generally compliments the defence of inerrancy if only for the basic reason that to say a document is historically reliable is to say it is truthful – accurately according with historical statements, events, and context.[61] The extent of its truthfulness would in turn determine the remarkability of its reliability. To give a more specific example: if there are historically verifiable reasons to believe that the words of Jesus as we have them now are *in fact* his words, then inerrancy is credibly established on account of its connection to *legitimate* discourses of Jesus on the nature of Scripture. Furthermore, if the recorded *events* of principal importance to the life and ministry of Jesus (his miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection) are historically reliable, then all his discourses, radical though many are, are firmly established as truthful (cf. John 19:35; 20:31).

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[59] To be clear, the dependence spoken of here is intentioned by God for a *unique manifestation* on account of his initiation; it is not the same as the fundamental dependence of all contingent creations upon the non-contingent divine for *sustenance*.

[60] Commenting specifically on the New Testament manuscript tradition, Komoszweski *et al.* (2006:76) explain that by comparison to other ancient literature "those who work with New Testament manuscripts suffer from an embarrassment of riches". This "embarrassment of riches" is not simply referring to the quantity of manuscripts, but the proximity of early manuscripts to the historical events in question (Komoszweski *et al*., 2006:77). And considering archaeological correspondence, taking the Old Testament as example, Ancient Near Eastern historian Kitchen (2003:500) concludes with allusion to the sheer substantivity of the evidence: "we have a consistent level of good, fact-based correlations right through from circa 2000 B.C. (with earlier roots) down to 400 B.C. In terms of general reliability – and much more could have been instanced than there was room for here – the Old Testament comes out remarkably well".

[61] To example the historicity of the Gospels: Blomberg (2009:444) clarifies correctly when saying that the historicity of the Gospels does not amount to "proof" of their "total trustworthiness". "Neither does it demonstrate their inspiration or inerrancy", he adds. The same is true for any document that is historically reliable. Nevertheless, historical reliability is consistent with inerrancy and to that extent complimentary, although not the sole nor primary means by which inerrancy is defended.

Jesus is arguably the crux of the investigation into the historicity of the New Testament. This is unsurprising given the centrality of Jesus to the New Testament. To example one notable aspect, the majority of New Testament historians readily acknowledge as "indisputable" (Tuckett, 2002:136) something so fundamental to Christian doctrine as the crucifixion of Jesus.[62] Therefore, there is a significant historical point of reference with respect to Jesus. Even the normative higher-critical terms "*Historie*" (referring to verifiable historical events and persons) and "*Geschichte*" (the "non-verifiable significance" of the historical events and persons) are noted as being "most often" applied to Jesus and that the distinction inherent to the two terms was likely first made by the nineteenth-century German liberal theologian, Martin Kähler, while critiquing, unsurprisingly, the historicity of Jesus (Hasbrouck & Scott, 2013:2395). This kind of distinction still exists today, particularly in the expression of the so-termed "Jesusanity",[63] modelled by Bart Ehrman and the surviving fellows of the Jesus Seminar[64] most notable of which is arguably John Dominic Crossan (cf. Bock & Wallace, 2007:11). The aim of Jesusanity (and higher-critical scholarship[65] in general) is to "excavate Jesus", not simply by means of archaeology but by exegeting away the "layers" (the proverbial *fluff* of Christology) in the Gospel texts (Crossan & Reed, 2002:xvii). Yarbrough (2013:2708) justifiably believes the "pillars" of the Jesus Seminar predetermine the conclusion of the inauthenticity of Jesus' sayings as recorded in the Gospels – the pillars quite simply constitute anti-supernaturalist presupposition leading to the conclusion. With these pillars presupposed, the criteria for historical authenticity[66] are stifled in the demonstration of the historicity of the miraculous events attributed to Jesus; his resurrection chief among them. Taking the resurrection as example, others have noted that the criteria apply fluidly to the details pertaining to the resurrection recorded in the Gospels. As Gromacki (2016:41) explains: "The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ meets the criteria of authenticity used by the Jesus Seminar". Gromacki (2016:41) proceeds to delineate the three criteria: multiple attestation (citing the four Gospels and the early Christian creed relayed in 1 Corinthians 15), dissimilarity (citing the discord between Jesus and the Jewish paradigm of the

[62] Habermas (2008:252), after noting that 28 of the 45 ancient sources (intra- and extra-biblical) refer to the crucifixion of Jesus, explains that "It is fair to assert that this is one of the best attested facts in ancient history".
[63] In their book *Dethroning Jesus* Bock and Wallace (2007:4) take aim against Jesusanity in particular, explaining by way of definition that the movement proffers "no enthronement of Jesus at God's side, only the power of his teaching and example".
[64] Remaining true to the first of "seven pillars" of the Jesus Seminar, which is that "the 'historical' Jesus is not the 'Christ' confessed by the church" (Yarbrough, 2013:2706). The distinction in question is clearly outlined by this first pillar.
[65] That is, the "anti-supernaturalist stance" predominant in this scholarship over the last two-hundred years (Schultz, 2013:2377).
[66] Holmén (2014:43-54) deals winsomely with most of the criteria applied to Jesus in the Gospels (recurrent attestation; dissimilarity; multiple attestation; coherence; historical intelligibility; implausibility; incoherence), particularly in his making the criterion of embarrassment a subdivision of the criterion of dissimilarity, and persuasively separating the criterion of recurrent attestation (a recurring motif in one source) from that of multiple attestation (of one motif or tradition in two or more independent sources).

Messiah), and coherence (citing the resurrection of Jesus as comporting with the death of Jesus and his empty tomb, two parallel historical facts). There are, of course, more criteria that are suitably applied; the criterion of recurring attestation for example (many post-resurrection appearances over 40 days (Matt 28:8-9; 28:17; Luke 24:13, 34; John 20:18-19, 26; 21:1).[67] The criterion of early attestation (cf. McDowell & McDowell, 2017:241) is also fitting; the Gospels being in line with the early creedal statement witnessing to the resurrection, relayed in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul attests to the resurrected Jesus, and likewise from first-hand experience of his appearance (1 Cor 15:8). McDowell and McDowell (2017:162) comment on 1 Corinthians 15 highlighting the historical context as being as early as the eyewitnesses: "Paul was stating that many who had seen the risen – and clearly historical – Jesus were still alive". The rationale behind the recurrent attestation criterion as explained by Holmén (2014:47) compliments the early attestation criterion. The two together befit the understanding of 1 Corinthians 15 as re-conveying an early creed. The recurrent attestation rationale is as follows, suggesting the catalytic role of early attestation: "A greater dispersion of a motif suggests that the motif has landed in the Jesus tradition very early and through several tradents. It further suggests that already then the motif had been widely accepted and experienced as central" (Holmén, 2014:47). Furthermore, Holmén (2014:47) identifies the considerable scholarly consensus for the criterion of recurrent attestation as "[lending] an exceptionally strong support to authenticity". Holmén (2014:48-49) also acknowledges similar strength in the criterion of dissimilarity, going on to explain that the criterion of dissimilarity "rather well complements" the criterion of recurrent attestation. Elsewhere, Holmén (2017:221), after exegeting Deuteronomy 21:22-23, and investigating the broader historical context of Judaism, describes the understanding, to the ancient Jewish mind, of anyone crucified as "categorically negative". Holmén (2017:198) sets out to answer if, given the latter understanding, any positive understanding of crucifixion could be uncovered within Judaism prior to Jesus. Holmén (2017:222) concludes: "The results of this essay strongly suggest that prior to Jesus' death and its interpretation Judaism knew no hermeneutics capable of transforming the ignominious death of crucifixion into something favorable". This (perhaps intentionally) begs the question, which naturally follows: How *did* something as "categorically negative" as crucifixion come to be seen as positive in the case of Jesus alone? Surely the resurrection is the only event weighty enough to displace the negative Judaic paradigm of crucifixion – a tradition which, in the face of such a paradigm, surely needed more than *hearsay* or *claim* to establish itself. Although Holmén does not refer to any historicity criteria in his essay, his discourse examples dissimilarity, and evinces the strength of the criterion of dissimilarity in support of the resurrection. The implication is obvious: the validity of the resurrection as recorded in the New Testament is at least aided by historicity criteria.

[67] To be clear, it is not the specific tradition of the resurrection that applies to the recurrent attestation criterion, but the recurrent post-resurrection appearance motif, which in turn substantiates the resurrection as a central tradition.

As such, Ehrman's (2014:132) assertion that "when it comes to miracles such as the resurrection, historical sciences simply are of no help in establishing exactly what happened" is opposed; the assertion appearing grounded in anti-supernaturalist presupposition more than in the actual capacity/limits of the relevant criteria. It is agreed that there are limitations to the historicity criteria (just as there are limits to any tool), but also that they nevertheless assist in determining actual history (cf. Holmén, 2014:54). Since historicity criteria are suitably applied to the New Testament and since they demonstrate the miraculous as a suitable explanation of the relevant data, there is a precariousness to Ehrman's anti-supernaturalist presupposition. Completely aside from the miraculousness of the resurrection, if it is evaluated as the New Testament fundamentally presents it, that is, as a historical *event*, then it is to an extent historically determinable through the appropriate tools and relevant data.

Keller (2009:210) delivers the bottom line succinctly: "If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all he said; if he didn't rise from the dead then why worry about any of what he said?". The historicity of the resurrection invariably connects to the teachings of Jesus. When considering the historicity of Jesus and the events surrounding Him, examining the validity of the New Testament text is *par for the course*. But if the resurrection, as a recorded event, proves at the very least historically plausible, then the recorded sayings of Jesus require the utmost consideration. Nevertheless, Ehrman (2005:10) calls the validity of the New Testament into question by pointing to the nature of the manuscript tradition. The sceptical bent of higher-critical scholarship ultimately answers the question "Did Jesus really say?" in the negative, but without really lessening their burden of proof. Granted, the manuscript tradition is central to the historical reliability of the New Testament (and to the whole of Scripture), but it is precisely here that the burden of proof for the sceptic is felt.

3.4.3.1 Manuscripts and autographs

When approaching the manuscripts and autographs, early attestation is a central concern, particularly because whether or not it is *appropriate* to apply early attestation to the manuscripts in question is a fixation for sceptics. The very notion of "excavating Jesus" presupposes that the existing data about Jesus are obscure and corrupted in transmission; not only that the "genuine" article and/or "earliest" witness needs finding but that it is a dubious endeavour, despite the relevant exegetical, text-critical, and archaeological efforts – it is the art of remaining in scholarly speculation about things which are relatively certain. But this is the underlying issue that needs addressing, namely, the *unnecessary* scepticism with which the available data (the manuscript tradition in particular) are handled. To draw out a particular bone of contention, the miraculous as preserved in the manuscript tradition need not be treated *a priori* as legend developed generations after the "actual" historical events – especially if said miraculous event comports with historicity criteria, even apart from the early attestation criterion. Now, Ehrman supplements his rejection of the historicity of the miraculous by proclaiming the illegitimacy of the New Testament text as a whole, mainly pointing to the evident variance in the manuscripts in concert with the extensive protraction of the manuscript tradition (the main consideration of this section). Ehrman (2005:10) explains: "Not only do we not have the originals, we don't have the first copies of the originals … What we have are copies made later – much later. In most cases they are copies made many *centuries* later. And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places". Ehrman (2005:10) builds to his power point: "there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament". After such a strong statement Ehrman's (2005:11) conclusion, namely, that God didn't perform the "miracle" of preserving the text, following which there is "no reason" for the "earlier miracle" of inspiration, is only cursorily sensible. Of course, the New Testament framed in this way engenders scepticism towards the sum-total of its content, never mind the miraculous. Defending the veracity and faithfulness of the text of Scripture involves showing that such a sceptical frame fails to contain the nature of the manuscript tradition – that it is much too sweeping and shallow. First, however, it is important to concede some facts that Ehrman presents. It is true that we don't have the originals (the autographs), it is also true that there are *very many* textual variants in the manuscript tradition; in fact, Wallace (2017) rightly describes Ehrman's comparison of the extent of the variants as "a bit of an understatement", considering the number of variants is 500 000 to the New Testament's 140 000 words (rounded). Ehrman's comparison sounds impressive without the appropriate context; i.e., the comparison is seriously misdirected. And ultimately, the comparison *defeats* the point Ehrman attempts to make by it (the text's corruption).[68] There are at least two indications of Ehrman's misdirection. 1) The proportions[69] of the manuscript tradition. As Wallace (2017) candidly explains, "a half-million textual variants in all that material is actually not that big of a deal". 2) Applying insignificant

[68] Amidst the eighteenth-century stir of John Mill's New Testament and its then unprecedented record of 30 000 variants, Richard Bentley is famed for having argued that the many variant readings are in fact helpful to determining the original text of the New Testament; a principle which still applies in New Testament textual criticism (cf. Harris, 1962:215).

[69] There are over 5 800 Greek New Testament manuscripts alone, with the average being 450 pages long, making for a total of over 2.6 million pages (cf. Wallace, 2017). That is to say nothing of the nearly 24 000 New Testament manuscripts in the sum of the various languages (Armenian, Slavic, and Latin among the majority) (cf. McDowell & McDowell, 2017:53). However, the "embarrassment of riches" is appropriately understood by comparison: extant manuscripts for classical authors, if stacked in a pile reach 1.2 metres, while extant New Testament manuscripts reach 1.6 kilometres, and a staggering 4 kilometres when including the Old Testament manuscripts (cf. McDowell & McDowell, 2017:54).

variance[70] as evidence against the original text's preservation. Ehrman (2005:10) does acknowledge that the majority of the variants are insignificant. This then begs the question: why does Ehrman employ the aforementioned comparison when he knows it is inappropriate in service to his point? Directly after Ehrman (2005:10-11) acknowledges that the majority of differences are "completely immaterial and insignificant" he asks, "what is one to make of all these differences?", thereafter concluding that the preservation of the text is baseless. Ehrman has indeed frequently been critiqued on the apparent disjunction between what he as a scholar believes, what his book (*Misquoting Jesus*) implies, and what he later clarifies in interviews (cf. Bock & Wallace, 2007:71-75; Craig, 2010; Wallace, 2017). Particularly ironic is an appended interview in the paperback edition of Misquoting Jesus. When Ehrman (2005:252) is asked why he believes core tenets of Christian orthodoxy are jeopardised by scribal errors in contrast to Bruce Metzger (notable textual critic and Ehrman's mentor), Ehrman rather clarifies his agreement with Metzger: "that the essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition". Bock and Wallace (2007:74), providing an overview of Ehrman's interviews, conclude: "The impression Ehrman gives in his book – but especially repeats in his interviews – is that of wholesale uncertainty about the original wording, a view that is far more radical than the one he actually embraces". Craig (2010) notes another inconsistency, referencing a radio interview of Ehrman, Craig remarks on the interviewer's bemusement after Ehrman, when asked what he thought the original wording of the New Testament was, responded by affirming the success of textual criticism at recovering the majority of the original text. Now, if the original text is recoverable and its meaning with it, then the impetus for speculation about an alternate "original" text (or meaning) is ethereal.[71] Ehrman's inconsistencies ultimately betray his deeper presupposition, namely that the majority (if not all) of extant manuscripts have been corrupted to suit the preferences of what is considered orthodox Christianity (cf. Bock & Wallace, 2007:40). Ehrman (2011:xii, 29; cf. 2005:51) reinforces his presupposition by suggesting that the inferiority of first century Christian scribes necessitated the corruption of the original text to some extent; the text corrupted further still by scribes pressed to establish a theological (particularly, Christological) agenda. That Ehrman jumps to superimpose the latter historical theory across the spectrum of the earliest manuscripts is

[70] Wallace (2017; 2013:154) has provided different case studies demonstrating the variability engendered by the inflectional nature of Greek; where a proposition can be written hundreds of different ways yet retain one meaning, nevertheless that each variant construction would be counted a variant of the text.

[71] The general consensus among textual critics is that the original text verifiably remains among authoritative manuscripts (early manuscripts and/or manuscripts with early common ancestors, like codex Vaticanus and Sinaiticus). The extent of the text's recovery is in fact noted as *more* than 99 percent. Wallace (2018) has recently committed to as little as 1/5 of 1 percent of the textual variants being both "meaningful and viable" (meaningful in the sense that they change the meaning of the text, and viable in the sense that they could go as far back as the original text), with 70 percent of this fraction comprising of spelling differences. Wallace (2013:156) elsewhere qualifies with emphasis this fractional percentage of readings as "[changing] the meaning of the text *to some degree*". Wallace (2013:158) embroiders the degree of change with the example of Romans 5:1 and the uncertainty about whether therein "*echomen*" (we have peace) or "*echōmen*" (let us have peace) is original, giving a commonsense conclusion: "neither variant is a contradiction of the teaching of Scripture".

warning enough, but his theory is also held together by frail speculative strands. Firstly, it is based on an overemphasis of how removed the extant manuscripts are from the first century originals. Wallace (2013:147) provides needed perspective: "To argue that the New Testament manuscripts from the *early* centuries are not very plentiful is *only* true in relation to later *New Testament* manuscripts – not to anything else in the ancient world". Evans (2014) explains both the extent of the early manuscripts and the resulting practicality afforded for textual criticism:

> We have nearly all gospel text within 200 years of the originals; we don't just have a handful that are old – we have hundreds. We have thousands that predate the Gutenberg printing press. This means that through comparison and examination, reconstruction and hard work (what's called textual criticism), we can with confidence reconstruct the text as it was originally written, or at least come within about 99 percent of it.[72]

Maintaining the latter, a misleading emphasis is identified when Ehrman (2005:10) writes that, "We don't even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals" – the context of this statement has no balancing qualification. The "stability" of the New Testament text is attested to even by scholars outside the field of New Testament textual criticism. Commenting on the remarks of Frederik Wisse[73] who notes the early consensus over the New Testament text's stability, and that such consensus is miraculous if indeed there had been extensive changes to the text early on, Evans (2018) adds "he wasn't being pious or theological – no intended apologetic there in his observation. But he ought to know, because as a scholar of Coptic Gnostic texts, he knew what instability was all about".

Secondly, the idea that scribes could alter the manuscript tradition early on with the intention of changing "original" Christological doctrine is an overemphasis of scribal power, especially considering the characteristics of the gospel record, and the longevity of ancient manuscripts. Williams (2018) expounds various "logistical problems" with the notion of intentional scribal alterations: "If we start with the four gospels what we find is that at first each of the four gospels is written in separate places, but fairly early on people begin to transmit the four gospels as a group, which means that effectively you have the gospels being transmitted in two different media".

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[72] While many of these ancient (second century to early third century) copies are fragmentary (e.g., P4; P52; P64; P90; P104; and most recently, P137), there are a number of that time period that are quite substantive, between 20 and 60 pages, spanning several New Testament books (e.g., P46; P66; P75).

[73] Wisse (1989:52-53), a notable textual critic of Coptic Gnostic texts, remarked that if "the text of the Gospels had been subjected to extensive redactional change and adaptation during the second century, the unanimous attestation of a relatively stable and uniform text during the following centuries in both Greek and the other versions would have to be considered nothing short of a miracle".

Controlled alteration amidst such transmission, if not untenable from the beginning is surely unsustainable without clear indication in the manuscript tradition. Williams (2018) continues:

> … you could say that they [the gospels] were changed very early on. The problem with this is, the earlier you [suspect] those changes [happen], the less likely it is that anyone knew that one of those gospels was going to become part of *the* four gospels … So, in fact, the motivation for changing something in order to produce an effect is taken away because people don't know that it would have the effect.

Compounding the logistical problem is the longevity and consequent protracted accessibility of the autographs, assuring inflexibility for significant variation even well after the authorship of the originals. Tertullian is frequently cited on this matter (cf. Evans, 2015:30), indeed, his voice provides helpful insight into the historical context at issue. Tertullian (2006:420) writes with reference to the "authentic writings" of the apostles, listing the regions where the autographs were to be accessed, and urging visitation for confirmation of the fact. Furthermore, Evans (2015) has explored archaeological evidence relevant to ancient manuscripts, concluding by way of many examples (venerated religious texts in particular) that literary papyri were capable of lasting *centuries* in circulation. Evans (2015:26) draws from the stratigraphic evidence at an excavation in Oxyrhynchus, where "a collection of second and third-century manuscripts was found in a layer of fill that was dated to the fourth and fifth centuries", and with "dated correspondence" confirming the stratigraphy. For further substantiation, Evans (2015:26) cites George Houston's (classical scholar) remarkable findings, "that literary manuscripts were in use anywhere from 75 to 500 years, with the average of about 150 years". Evans (2015:29) adds the weighty New Testament manuscripts, P66 and P75, as examples of this longevity. The manuscripts are believed to have been recovered from a monastery founded in AD 320, from which is determined their circulation up to that time; "at least one century old at the founding of the monastery" (Evans, 2015:29). The implication for the stability of the New Testament is clear; the earliest copies could be compared with the autographs for centuries, potentially, safeguarding the text's authentic transmission for substantially extended periods of time. Evans (2011) explains his theory elsewhere more clearly:

> New Testament autographs and first copies could still have been available when our oldest extant papyri manuscripts (e.g., P45, P46, P66) were produced. If still in circulation and being read and copied, the autographs and first copies would have continued to give shape to the text. In a sense, then, the gap between autograph and extant manuscript is bridged.

Indeed, the manuscript tradition is as a bridge whose rungs not only connect but overlap.

Beyond the aforementioned logistical problems for scribal tampering, even something as fundamental to the evidence as the variability in scribal alterations diminishes the likelihood of an early unified scribal effort towards a particular Christology displacing another. As Wallace (2012) explains, “although scribes changed the wording of the text for all sorts of reasons, they were unsuccessful at eradicating the wording of the original. It was both the orthodox scribes and the unorthodox who tampered with the text”. Garthecole (2018) concurs, emphasising the lack of substance on any one side: “we’re very, very hard-pressed to find any manuscript where we can see that a scribe has, with any consistency at all, changed the text – whether in an orthodox direction or indeed in an unorthodox direction”. If manuscripts overlapped their respective durations of use, there simply isn’t the potential to be locked into grey areas and endless speculation; any alterations, whether gradual or sudden, are more likely traceable to the point of deviation in the manuscript tradition. Even in the event of wild alterations, Wallace (2012) explains: “if that is the case scholars are in an excellent position for finding the original, because there’s no conspiracy, only chaos”. The invariable result is the stability of the New Testament. Importantly, however, to single out sudden (and sizable) deviation, there are two deviations of this sort that form part of what is arguably still in question for the original wording of the New Testament: the *pericope adulterae* (John 7:53-8:11) and the long ending of Mark (16:9-20). At first one might think this is evidence against the preservation of the original wording. However, it is precisely because the point of deviation is traced within the manuscript tradition that we can be relatively certain about what is and is not original (but not to say unhistorical) with respect to these passages. [74] Evans

[74] In the case of the *pericope adulterae* it is noted that “the case against its being of Johannine authorship appears to be conclusive”; yet that it “has all the earmarks of historical veracity” (Metzger, 1994:188). And the true ending of Mark is touted by some as “arguably the greatest text-critical problem in the whole of NT studies” (Lunn, 2014:vii). However, compared with the long ending, the short ending of Mark is more credibly original not simply with reference to the manuscript tradition but with respect to the internal evidence of Mark itself (Metzger, 1994:105). Metzger (1994:105) takes as “most probable” that “the Gospel accidentally lost its last leaf before it was multiplied by transcription”. Wallace (2012) argues convincingly against Metzger (and Ehrman): after noting that the loss of the original ending of Mark “isn’t the majority opinion”, Wallace explains the difficulty with the lost leaf theory; “if Mark was written on a scroll, which it almost certainly was, it [the ending] would be the most protected after rolling up”. One can hardly suggest (though it is possible) that the scroll was rolled beginning-side first; such would not be practical for natural beginning-to-end reading. Whatever Mark’s ending, there is, ultimately, no concern regarding Christian doctrine. Concerns raised over the lack of recorded resurrection appearances in the short ending of Mark are ultimately of little consequence, *in light of the allusiveness of Mark*. As Tabor (2018) exhorts: “if we decide to *listen* to Mark, who is our first gospel witness, what we learn is rather amazing … What Mark believes [cf. Mark. 14:28] is that Jesus has been ‘lifted up’ or ‘raised up’ to the right hand of God and that the disciples would ‘see’ him in Galilee”. The latter demonstrates the allusiveness of Mark, with respect to which the short ending of Mark is arguably most consistent (cf. Wallace, 2008:37-38).

(2018) argues for stability derived from the two passages in question. Evans (2018) (cf. Metzger, 1994:104-105,188) muses:

> Isn't it interesting? The only two places where there really is a question is well attested in the manuscript tradition. There is no way this has slipped under the radar, it's caught. We go back to our earliest texts, and the passage in John just isn't there, and scholars note that the language in the passage doesn't really sound much like John's language. And when we look at the ending of Mark, some of the same reservations are registered.

Lastly, what Ehrman draws from to substantiate the theory of scribal tampering is dubious. Ehrman does not even-handedly analyse the manuscripts he uses for substantiation of his claims. Such is the general demonstration of Wasserman (2012:329-348) who, in an essay whose title jeeringly begins "*Misquoting Manuscripts? …*", takes aim at Ehrman's exemplar verses for scribal tampering (e.g. John 1:18; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Cor 10:5,9). We briefly expand with reference to the example of 1 Corinthians 10:5,9. Wasserman (2012:346) demonstrates that one of the manuscripts (codex 81) Ehrman uses as a source for the shift to high Christology (through the omission of *ὁ θεός* [God] in codex 81's transmission of 1 Corinthians 10:5, such that the subject bestowing judgment becomes *Χριστός* [Christ; following on from verse 4]) is inconsistent in establishing this shift, since codex 81 is one of the "very few" manuscripts that makes use of *θεόν* a few verses on (10:9) instead of the "better attested readings *Χριστός* and *κύριον* [Lord]". Wasserman (2012:346) continues discerningly: "It seems to me that θεόν in v.9 would be the least expected reading to find in a witness alleged to heighten the Christology of a passage". Understanding that the context is as such for the manuscript in question, and similarly for Ehrman's other exemplar verses cited out of the respective manuscripts, it follows plainly that Ehrman indeed "overinterprets textual minutiae" (Wasserman, 2012:333). An overview of the evidence provides outline enough to comfortably settle against the notion of early scribal tampering, especially not to the effect of losing the original wording; that the limitations which rendered control of the original New Testament text untenable for the earliest scribes remained for centuries after them. Such was the conclusion of Wisse (1989:45) (opposing Helmut Koester, the notable German-American New Testament scholar who also proposed early scribal tampering): "Long after the third century the church was in no position to establish and control the biblical text, let alone eliminate rival forms of the text". So, while it is true that we do not have the autographs, we do have the original New Testament text of Scripture as preserved throughout the manuscript tradition. The burden of proof is upon the sceptic if the New Testament text is established to 99.8 percent of the original; especially since the remaining 0.2 percent has no bearing on informing the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Furthermore, the sceptics' argument is not simply that the autographs are lost (inadvertently through time and scribal mistakes, but also advertently by scribal intervention), but that they were lost a relatively short time after they were written. With respect to the text-critical and archaeological evidence, mostly the latter aspect of the sceptics' argument is called into question, along with the supplementary oversimplifications of scribal practices.

Arguing for the corruption of the Old Testament by scribal tampering appears even more indefensible. It is especially indefensible while maintaining evangelical sensibilities, since this is the portion of Scripture which Jesus *explicitly* confirmed as entirely truthful (cf. John 10:35; Matt 5:18). And elsewhere (Luke 11:49-51) Jesus implicitly confirms its entire truthfulness: "We too cannot see anything else in it [Luke 11:49-51] than that the Saviour has in mind 2 Chr 24:21, and in this way brings together the murder of the prophets from the first to the last book of the Old Testament canon" (Lange & van Oosterzee, 2008:191). But even the sceptic cannot brush the evidence for the preservation of the Old Testament text aside as incidental or construed. Now, it remains true that "Practically nothing is known about the history of each individual autograph of the Old Testament" (Jensen, 1978:20). Nevertheless, as Jensen (1978:20) continues, "No ancient writing has been so carefully preserved in the process of scribal copying as have the Old Testament Scriptures". And this statement is qualified with respect to the historical evidence. Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (hereafter, DSS) in Qumran (c. 1946-1947 AD) (among the scrolls uncovered, the full spectrum of Old Testament books was represented, except for the book of Esther) there was suspicion that modern Old Testament translations were hopelessly deviant, since up to that time they were based entirely on the far-removed medieval Masoretic Text[75] (hereafter, MT) (cf. Price, 2008:162). Price (2008:162) helpfully condenses the statistics for the extent of comparability between the DSS and the MT serving to allay such suspicion:

> Taking for their [textual critics] point of comparison the Great Isaiah Scroll [1QIsa^{a}] … a completely intact copy dated to 125 B.C., it was found to have a 95 percent agreement with the Masoretic Text. The 5 percent variation consisted primarily of obvious slips of the pen and spelling alterations. This also proved to be the case for all of the other biblical scrolls among the Dead Sea Scrolls. In fact, about 60 percent of these biblical texts reflect the same text as that in the Masoretic Text.

[75] Developed by a class of Jews known as Masoretes (c. seventh to tenth century AD), who, employing strict scribal rules, focussed on the precise transmission of the text.

However, there is disagreement regarding the nature of 1QIsa[a] as representing the original Old Testament text. Tov (2014:53) describes 1QIsa[a] as "a classroom example of what an inferior text looked like".[76] Fortunately, proto-Masoretic variants (e.g., 1QIsa[b] – *ca.* first-century BC) were also uncovered, proving valuable points of reference. Holden and Geisler (2013:44), comparing 1QIsa[b] with *Codex Leningradensis* (the oldest MT manuscript – *ca.* 1008 AD) elucidate that "the two texts are almost word-for-word identical". And regarding the types of variations found, Holden and Geisler (2013:51) continue by way of example: "A sample typical of the whole Hebrew text was taken from the famous Isaiah 53 passage. In a thousand years of copying it, there was only one word difference ('light' in v. 11), and it made no difference in the meaning of the text!". Furthermore, as to the spectrum of variation, Holden and Geisler's (2013:45-46) estimation appears sound: "The textual variants … in the text appear to be classifiable as individual variants … The variants are not ones that reflect a general, systematic tendency to purposefully alter or revise the original meaning of the text". Moreover, simply the awareness of the distinctiveness of ancient Jewish scribal practices, characterised by fastidious intentionality, cautions against conclusions for scribal tampering. The strict scribal rules encompassed everything from the materials for copying (only the medium of cleaned parchment and specially made ink; a designated writing implement for the names of God), to the manner in which the text was copied (letter for letter; never by memory; vocalising each word; periodic ceremonial cleansing; designated garb), and the format in which it was copied (each page required exacting margins) (McDowell & McDowell, 2017:98; cf. McDowell 2019 [for greater detail]). Importantly, the scribal methodologies described above antedate, by a considerable extent, the era of the earliest extant copies.[77] Wegner (2004:178) concludes appropriately after considering the statistical variation between manuscripts: "Old Testament textual criticism, therefore, concerns mainly details and discrepancies in relatively insignificant matters".

[76] The matter is not simple. A reference to Brug's (2014:191) presentation of the nuances of the counter-position must suffice.

[77] McDowell and McDowell (2017:92) provide the period margins for the scribal traditions described: "from the Persian period (c. fifth to fourth century BC.) to the copying of the medieval Masoretic Text (c. ninth to twelfth century AD)". The so called *soferim*, a formal Jewish scribal group believed to have originated at the former time period (around the time of Ezra), are said to represent a matured, professional, Jewish scribal tradition at that time (McDowell & McDowell, 2017:93,97). However, it isn't scribal professionalism *per se* that guarantees accurate transmission. With respect to the New Testament, Wallace (2017), considering the letter by letter copying of the uneducated scribe who produced P75, explains that such a means of copying demonstrably makes for faithful transmission, as opposed to the more professional scribes who would often skip over words to maintain stylistic preferences (exampling P66). Similarly, considering oral transmission as the earliest record of historical events that were to form part of the Old Testament text, it is variously noted that oral transmission as a means of historical record (such as in the case of the Torah) is far more reliable than popularly believed; cultures depending on such a form of transmission required greater intentionality in memorising information (Price, 2007:104). And, in the case of the Old Testament in particular, the period of time between oral transmission and written transmission is much shorter than often supposed, further decreasing the risk of corruption (Price, 2007:105). Furthermore, oral tradition and written record often ran confluently. Importantly, the transmission of the Old Testament was not monolithic; there were/are indeed variations (which the Dead Sea Scrolls attest to), but these variations are of no significance to the actual meaning/propositions of the text (cf. Jensen, 1978:21; Archer, 1965:18-19).

A few remarks on the preservation of Scripture as a corollary of divine inspiration and inerrancy is fitting at this juncture. We proceed with reference to the Majority Text[78] (hereafter, M-Text) and the Textus Receptus[79] (hereafter, TR). There are many who argue for inerrancy from the perspective that the M-Text or the TR solely preserve the divinely inspired text. But this is manifestly unnecessary, even aside from the sizable difficulties these respective positions encounter.[80] There is no logical reason for dismissing the earliest manuscripts, exampled in the Alexandrian text-type (P46; P66; P75; Vaticanus and Sinaiticus; etc.), as corrupt. To the contrary, it is axiomatic that the earliest manuscripts, being less removed from the autographs, provide valuable assurance of the original text. Not to say that the earliest manuscripts should be observed in isolation from later manuscripts; analytical correspondence across the spectrum of the manuscript tradition is what makes the manuscript tradition the useful purveyor of the original text that it is. As such, there is a persistent lineage of the text, which does not suffer the open-endedness apparent in the M-Text and TR. And since, in this way, the original text is as reliably determined as it is (there are no loose ends in the manuscript tradition which are artificially tied together towards this consensus among the majority of textual critics), there need not be a reliance on a particular fraction of the manuscript tradition, either large (M-text), or small (TR). Yes, the preservation of Scripture as a logical extension of divine inspiration is important; but this is the point, the manuscript tradition at large *does* preserve the text. The preservation of Scripture is rightly identified as a matter of *functional* importance with respect to divine inspiration: "The function of the apostolate was to make sure that the message of Christ was firmly and accurately preserved for future generations, through the help of the Holy Spirit, whether written by its members directly or through a close follower of theirs" (Köstenberger & Kruger, 2010:117). It stands to reason, then, that what is mostly at issue is the *conception* of this preservation. Rehurek (2008) draws out the Scripture passages used to argue for miraculous preservation (to the effect of *pristine* preservation in a manuscript or select few); (Matt 5:17-18; 24:35; 1 Pet 1:23-25; Ps 12:6-7; 119:89, 152, 160; Isa 40:8). Rehurek (2008:72) prefaces his assessment as follows:

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78 Developed by determining the majority consensus between manuscripts; such a majority consensus is expressed in the Byzantine text-type among the Greek manuscripts (c. fifth to twelfth century AD).

79 Based in part on the Byzantine text-type, although different from the M-Text, the "Received Text" (c. sixteenth century AD) was developed by Desiderius Erasmus from a handful of available Greek manuscripts dated relatively late (c. eleventh to fifteenth century AD).

80 Wallace (1992) has penned a convincing polemic against the M-text and TR positions, with the most compelling objections being those which elucidate how the positions are self-defeating. The chronology relative to the public accessibility of the Byzantine text is such an objection (Wallace, 1992:30). As Wallace (1992:30) emphasises: "there is not one solid shred of evidence that the Byzantine text even existed in the first three centuries of the Christian era. Not only this, but as far as our extant witnesses reveal, the Byzantine text did not become the majority text until the ninth century". And in the case of the TR, one not only has to consider the latter chronological problems, but also the loose manuscripts *created* by Erasmus himself, which "have never been found in any Greek manuscript" (Wallace, 1992:32).

> The foundational question to answer is whether or not the Lord has promised to preserve His Word … If commonly quoted passages used to defend preservation of the Word of God do not refer to the Bible itself, preservation cannot be defined as a doctrine. Rather, it must be defended on historical and theological grounds.

The latter deductive process is agreed upon. Rehurek (2008:72) continues: "The question is whether it was miraculously preserved or providentially preserved through secondary causation". Likewise, agreed. Although, it is wise to qualify that distinguishing between divine providence and the miraculous is not always simple, since they are both an entailment of divine involvement (cf. Holcomb, 2014), and any given providential set of events may be interspersed with miraculous events. It is necessary to expound more nuance. While Rehurek (2008:76-77) rightly explains that a case cannot be made from the texts in question for God having promised the pristine preservation of *manuscripts* (i.e. M-text/TR position), he does not consider that *some* of the texts in question may in fact teach the preservation of the *original text*, albeit providentially by means of the manuscript tradition. To substantiate the latter, this study takes the position of Combs (2000:11).[81] Combs (2000:7, 43) has rightly criticised Wallace's (1992) polemic (and others') against the M-text/TR position as going too far, having *completely* denied a doctrine of preservation – Rehurek (2008:90) apparently follows suit in denying the doctrine. Combs (2000:26), after balanced exegesis, explains that while some passages (Ps 12:6-7; 119:89; 1 Pet 1:23-25) used by the M-Text/TR group are inappropriate in substantiation of a doctrine of preservation (their context not referencing the preservation of the *written* Word of God; Scripture) others Ps 119:152, 160, Isa 40:8, Matt 5:18, 24:35 and John 10:35 either directly or indirectly teach preservation (their context indeed referencing the preservation of Scripture), although not pristine preservation. Furthermore, Combs' (2000:27) careful address of the corollary between inspiration and preservation is worth relaying:

> To say that there is a correlation or parallel between inspiration and preservation does not reveal anything about the exact nature of that preservation. It is perfectly reasonable to assert a corollary between inspiration and preservation without asserting that preservation be in every way equal to inspiration – for example, that inerrant inspiration demands inerrant preservation.

[81] Combs (2000:11) elucidates the general consensus to which he belongs: "That God has preserved the Scriptures in the totality of the manuscript tradition has traditionally been the position of most evangelicals and fundamentalists on the subject of preservation. On the one hand, they have generally affirmed that a doctrine of preservation is taught in Scripture; on the other hand, they have rejected the view that preservation is restricted to just a single text-type (e.g., Byzantine text), printed text (e.g., TR), or version (e.g., KJV)".

Evidently, one significant factor leading to Ehrman's (2005:11) abandonment of inerrancy was the confusion of the relationship between preservation, inspiration and inerrancy. Note the wording: "if he didn't perform that *miracle*, [preservation] there seemed to be no reason to think he performed the earlier miracle of inspiring those words" (Ehrman, 2005;11, emphasis added). Ehrman's initial position was that which unnecessarily demands the miraculous, namely, the pristine preservation of the inspired text, as opposed to appreciating the providence of God in preserving the text by way of the manuscript tradition – while not pristinely, nevertheless, truly. Whatever the present apprehensions over the text of Scripture are, perhaps the most exciting reality for the whole enterprise of textual criticism is the likelihood of more manuscript discoveries. Shockingly, as Hurtado (2018) attests, "somewhere in the neighbourhood of 90-95 percent of the material that Grenfell and Hunt acquired in Oxyrhynchus has never been edited or opened". The potential certainly exists for newly catalogued manuscripts to ruffle quills; just as the newly published manuscript (P137; Mark) nearly managed (cf. Hixson, 2018); and as the oldest known fragment (P52; John) indeed managed, having sent "two tonnes of German scholarship to the flames" (Wallace, 2018).[82]

3.4.3.2 The canon

We now turn, briefly, to the nature of the canon of Scripture (hereafter, canon). When considering the nature of the canon, divine providence is front and centre once more. As such, understanding what the word *canon* means ("rule" or "standard"), that the canon is the Church's standard on what represents the written Word of God through historical consensus, are facts more superficial – not to say unimportant. Köstenberger and Kruger (2010:117) outline this deeper reality of the canon as not primarily a later historical development with respect to the New Testament: "It was the foundation *for* the church, not the consequence *of* the church. The idea of canon, therefore, does not formally belong in *church* history, but is more accurately understood as a central plank in *redemptive* history". Redemptive history is undeniably integral to the Old Testament canon too (cf. Luke 11:49-51; 24:27). And there is little else that witnesses as strongly to divine providence as does redemptive history. By extension, the determination of the message and doctrine foundational to the Church speaks strongest of divine providence if indeed that determination resulted from the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Such a scenario attests far more to divine providence than describing the canon as an administrative by-product of the early Church. Surely, it is unimaginable that the

[82] That is, the Hegelian Dialectic – thesis, antithesis, synthesis – a method which was applied by German scholarship to New Testament theology, but largely depended upon a late dating of John, which P52 falsified.

early Church would not have sought the Holy Spirit – whom, they were informed, was the One leading them into all truth – on this matter of the collection that was to be foundational to Church doctrine. Therefore, approaching the history of the canon without considering this posture of the early Church, is in fact to miss something integral to the history of the canon. This is the point: there is also a corollary between inspiration and canonisation which is necessary to note; canonisation being an extension of preservation. Warfield and Hodge (2015:24-25) have clearly made this point:

> The doctrine of inspiration, in its essence – and, consequently, in all its forms – presupposes a supernatural revelation and a supernatural providential guidance entering into and determining the genesis of Scripture from the beginning … every conclusion of critical investigation which denies the apostolic origin of a New-Testament book or the truth of any part of Christ's testimony in relation to the Old Testament and its contents … must be inconsistent with the true doctrine of inspiration.

Kruger (2012:58) relates to Warfield and Hodge with what he has called the "*ontological* definition" of the canon, explaining the difference by way of two common, nevertheless important, definitions of canon:

> Whether one defines canon as final reception (exclusive), [c. fourth century AD] or as authoritative use (functional), [c. second century AD] neither of these definitions fully accounts for the divine origins of the canon … both of these definitions largely overlook the ontology of the canon – what it *is* apart from what it does … if one takes the historic Christian position that the canon was given by God – and does not just 'become' a canon at a later point – then the canon can also be defined simply as the scriptural books that God gave the corporate church.

The objection of "presuppositional bias" is anticipated, but it is a moot objection. Pertinent to the topic of canonisation, there is no fundamental alternative to qualify this objection as having any practical value. As Kruger (2018) explains elsewhere with respect to canonisation: "if you start with a naturalistic assumption you end up with naturalistic conclusions". The critic cannot escape presupposition. Furthermore, critical to sound research, methodological consistency is at stake. White (2018) highlights this by alluding to the need for understanding the consistency between God's purpose in inspiring Scripture and his providential guidance of the Church in recognising what is inspired. White (2018) continues decrying the inconsistency of those “attacking” the latter “theological concept”: “they want to deny that these documents are *theópneustos* [God-breathed] – which is a theological concept – but they will only allow you to use historical, naturalistic methodology and information to defend the spiritual nature of these books”. The inconsistency is clear, and was clear even at the time of Warfield and Hodge’s defence. Kruger (2018) is right to urge against a “data driven” understanding of the canon: “You have got to have something standing behind it; a theological grid that says God gave these books. Yes, it took time for them to be received … but when the dust settled, we’re convinced, under God’s providence, that these are the right books that the Church was to have”. Therefore, to deny the finalisation of the canon as a providential move of the Spirit is in essence to deny inspiration as a miraculous move of the Spirit, since inspiration fulfils its purpose by means of canonisation. By the canon the Church is provided the *extent* of the inspired writings purposed “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

3.4.4 Hermeneutics

We now reach matters more typical of the inductive analysis of Scripture; that is, assessing the propositional validity of Scripture. As this too involves analysis, reason is necessarily applied, but not without Scripture posing a unique challenge. In this context, Archer (1965:16) considers the value of human reason to be in its ability to engage the evidence (historical and textual elements of Scripture) and thereby *recognise* whether the text in question is divine in origin. Archer (1965:16) explains that the evidence of Scripture as something historically unique lends itself to such a recognition, in contradistinction to other holy books.[83] However, there is at once a difficulty for the inductive analysis of Scripture, if indeed Scripture represents divine revelation. As Archer (1965:16) continues: “it is a very different thing for human reason to attempt to pass judgment upon divine revelation … For such judgments to be valid, they must proceed from a judge who possesses a knowledge of metaphysical truth which is superior to that of the revelation itself”. Obviously, no human can so preside. Nevertheless, Scripture has variously been judged as anything from historically and scientifically deficient, to self-contradictory – and as we have seen,

[83] This historical distinctive is manifest in “prior prophecy and subsequent fulfilment, and the all-pervading presence of the divine-human Redeemer” (Archer, 1965:15). Regarding fulfilled prophecy, it extends from political history (Dan 2:39-40), to redemptive history (Dan 9:25-27). The reader of Scripture should most appreciate this: Scripture’s consistency; even though a collection of literature spread over many hundreds of years, Scripture witnesses throughout to the redemptive-historical narrative fulfilled in Jesus (cf. Carson, 2010:24). Commenting on the Pentateuch, Martin Luther said it most succinctly, “‘*all the Scriptures point to Christ alone*’” (Marsh, 2017:153). Chapell (2014:7), addressing the book of Daniel, describes the reality eloquently: “Christ’s grace does not wait until the last chapters of Matthew to make its appearance but rather is the dawning light increasing throughout Scripture toward the day of the Saviour”.

this judgment is often penned by scholars who maintain that Scripture *is* divine revelation. However, it is precisely the unique historical character of Scripture, alluding to its divine origin, that has compelled others to question these judgments. Yes, there exists both the naturalistic presupposition and theistic presupposition when approaching Scripture, but this peculiar historical character of Scripture, even by itself, gives the advantage to the latter over the former. Furthermore, given the *a priori* of Scripture as divine revelation, it is more consistent to approach the alleged deficiencies and contradictions as *difficulties* that require contextual understanding. This may come with the admission that not everything is known – to no shame – but never resignation to the difficulty as unsolvable. The emphasis falls upon principled hermeneutics in achieving objective understanding of such difficult passages. On this matter, Carson (2010:40) writes wisely:

> Christians need each other; this is as true in the hermeneutical arena as elsewhere. Provided there is a shared deep commitment to submit to the authority of God's revelation, and not the passing fads and agendas (academic and otherwise) of those who want to pass judgement on Scripture, the recognition that none of us knows it all encourages humility.

This is the heart of the appeal, and it is most agreeable: "In all our probing of Scripture, we must never discard the virtue of humility"; "the aim … is not so much to become masters of Scripture, but to be mastered by it" (Carson, 2010:24; 40) (cf. Isa 66:2; John 8:31; 14:15; 15:7). If this is the posture, then literary tools (or in fact any tool) are not simply applied reductionistically to the text but applied to the text in the interest of submitting to its meaning (cf. Carson, 2010:89). Now, submission to the meaning of the text implies *objectivity*, a notion which puts one at odds with the *new hermeneutic* (Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling c. twentieth century AD) which is, essentially, a redress of the neo-orthodox approach to hermeneutics.[84] Nevertheless, Carson (2010:38) is right in not throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater; the new hermeneutic is useful in so far as it helps the interpreter of Scripture *realise* that they come to the text with "baggage" or biases specific to their context. But Carson (2010:39) rightly objects to the complimentary presupposition of the new hermeneutic: that these biases cannot be refined or trained out of the interpreter

[84] The new hermeneutic proffers the idea that multiple subjective interpretations of the text are not only viable but primary. But proposing that multiple subjective interpretations of a given text could all be primary is self-contradictory. And it is precisely this idea that is central to the neo-orthodox approach to interpretation (cf. Archer, 1965:25-26). The new hermeneutic is in fact "based on Rudolf Bultmann's radical critical methodology in interpreting Scripture" (Gruenler, 2013:3521). Howe (2012:28-29) ably refutes the new hermeneutic by lengthy deductive argument, systematically exposing its self-contradiction. Nevertheless, this much is clear, meriting greater caution: since the new hermeneutic is relativistic, it is well-suited to the march of relativism in Western culture. Indeed, there are modern expressions of the new hermeneutic. Exampling Kevin Vanhoozer's use of *speech act theory*, Geisler and Roach (2011:300-301) expound enough to demonstrate that *speech act theory* also makes subjective interpretation primary.

towards objective knowledge. It is sensible that this *can* be done; that there is no prohibition to a person learning something outside their context is testimony to the fact. More to the point, Carson's balanced assessment of the new hermeneutic provides prime example that even methods and tools most contrary to orthodox biblical interpretation can still be of *some* use, although mostly derivative. Conversely, even a tool as esteemed by confessional evangelicals as harmonisation is subject to misapplication.[85] And even allegiance to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic does not guarantee that the interpreter rightly understands the historical or grammatical context. However, this study does agree to the primacy of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic; that it provides the best framework for arriving at the objective meaning of the text (Geisler & Roach, 2011:296).[86] This is particularly in view of the canon as closed. If one understands the canon as the complete account of redemptive history, then one can understand that antecedent typological events have an objective referent (not retrospectively read into the text, but actual), thereby arriving at a central objective proposition of Scripture: Jesus is *the* redeemer. As Carson (2010:282) explains, objecting to Enn's use of the second temple hermeneutic: "Quite a number of the 'mystery' passages of the New Testament turn on unpacking some things that are *genuinely there in the biblical texts*, but which have been 'hidden' in the past until the great revelatory event of Jesus Messiah has taken place". Carson (2010:282) continues: "Their hermeneutic [the New Testament writers] … rests on the unpacking of the Bible's storyline". A storyline which is understood *reverentially* as conveying divine-human engagement and, as such, a storyline fundamentally historical.

The above serves to preface approaching the difficulties in Scripture. We now turn, briefly, to some of those difficulties. Space does not afford a treatment of all the difficulties, but there are four overarching categories representing the spectrum of difficulties for engagement. In these respective categories the aim is to show, although not exhaustively, nevertheless, that the difficulties raised are far from knock-down objections to the doctrine of inerrancy. That said, the endeavour must come with concession and disclaimer, which Kaiser Jr. (2009:46) condenses:

> Enough progress has been made in the area of reconciling apparent contradictions that the case for the unity of the Bible can be sustained. This does not mean that all of the problems have been solved successfully or to the agreement of all scholars, but it does mean that

[85] It is unfortunate for Harold Lindsell that one of his harmonisations has become the exemplar for the "major debacles" (Kaiser Jr., 2009:46) of harmonisation. Lindsell (1976:174-176) made the mistake of attributing six denials to Peter to reconcile the account in Mark (14:30) of his denials after *two* cock crows as opposed to after *a* crow in the other Gospels, which in no way fits with the respective texts.

[86] For example, even redaction criticism (which has come to encompass other tools such as form and source criticism) is shown as dependent on the historical data largely derived from the text to be of any use in arriving at the meaning (or, particularly, emphases) of the text (Carson, 2010:155, 173).

> enough principles are operating that provide us with a good measure of success and a sufficient confidence that the remaining issues can be remedied in similar ways as the ones that now rest securely within the enormous amount of material in the noncontradicted sections of the Bible.

In other words, for the sceptic, "It is not sufficient to show a difficulty, which may spring out of our defective knowledge of the circumstances" (Warfield & Hodge, 2015:36).

3.4.4.1 Theological discrepancy

In his section outlining the "Master Questions" of the Old Testament, as part of the "master problem of theology", Kaiser Jr. (2018:6) lists the question, "Is the God of the Old Testament a different one from the God of the New?" as "the first and greatest problem". Furthermore, Kaiser Jr. (2018:6) observes that among those who answer the question in the affirmative is the heretic Marcion, who went on to form his own canon, axing the Old Testament. Marcion's motive was the belief that God as revealed in the Old Testament was the malevolent antithesis of the benevolent New Testament God; the Old Testament, Marcion thought, God was rather a lesser evil demiurge. This perspective arose out of an improper literal reading of the Old Testament (cf. Moll, 2010:159), predisposing Marcion to the conclusion that the God of the Old Testament was indeed a judge, but an unjust one; "a particularly cruel one" (Moll, 2010:62). And so, with the dichotomy established between the God of the Old Testament and the New, a moral objection is framed. The conquest of Canaan (Deut 20:10-20) is the darling of the dichotomy, the focal centre of the framed moral objection. Understandably, Copan (2011:239) suggests that it is "Probably the most difficult Old Testament ethical issue". Some, like Dawkins, go as far as to use the conquest of Canaan as evidence for atheism. A verbose judgment ensues: "The God of the Old Testament … bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser … capriciously malevolent bully" (Dawkins, 2008:51). However, far from discrediting God, Dawkins' judgment amounts only to an adjectival smokescreen, lacking exegetical – and even philosophical – substance. Nevertheless, this is the theology of many at the popular level. Others, within the evangelical camp, like Enns (2013:108), contend that the conquest is yet another record not of actions following the word of God to Israel, but of the erroneous conceptions of people, of "ancient people", "tribal people" expressing God in tribalistic terms. Enns (2013:92) also appeals to the character and teachings of Jesus as juxtaposing the conquest account, as such discrediting the scriptural status of the account. But what ever happened to apprehending the seriousness of sin? It is the seriousness of sin that establishes the conquest as befitting the context of Scripture at large. We may prove this by way of the gospel message. It is the seriousness of sin that validates – makes *just* – that seminal aspect of the gospel: Christ crucified. Without rightly understanding sin one would flippantly misconstrue the crucifixion of Jesus as a mere extension of the "divine cruelty" displayed in the Old Testament. Indeed, this is precisely what Dawkins (2008:287) does: "If God wanted to forgive our sins, why not just forgive them, without having himself tortured and executed in payment". There are a myriad of things that Dawkins does not perceive, but it would be simplest to answer this way: sin needs to be addressed in accordance with what it entails (human death), and that God should so address it is not merely internally consistent within Scripture, but a demonstration of his *justness*. To overlook sin and its entailment (which is essentially Dawkins' proposal) is to miss the gravity of sin's impact in basic human experience, and so, logically, it is a non-solution to a real problem – that is *true* injustice. Meanwhile, Enns overlooks, as a matter of overarching importance, the fact that Jesus came to *fulfil* the Old Testament. In service to his broader aim (discrediting the conquest account) Enns (2013:112) instead explains that "Jesus' teaching is a *reversal* of the Old Testament's dominant tone of exclusivism". Suppose we grant that exclusivism is the dominant tone (why not redemption?), very well, but the grace that made possible the inclusion of the Gentiles only followed the severest of judgements that was Jesus' crucifixion – inclusion followed fulfilment and fulfilment demanded what the uninformed might think the height of cruelty. And what of Jesus' other teachings? As Dillon (2014) points out, "he [Jesus] spoke approvingly of the destruction of Sodom, a pagan city that also included men, women, and children (Luke 17:28-29)". Furthermore, Jesus likens his second coming in judgment to the flood of Noah (Matt 24:39, 51). The latter really amounts to confirming the wrathful exclusion of those who do not put their trust in the finished work of the cross. The nub of the contention in the conquest of Canaan, maintaining its historical validity, is whether God's judgment in that instance, also *apparently* involving the destruction of man, woman and child, but *through Israel,* was just. Philosophically, of first importance is the recognition that if God is the most excellent being, then his execution of justice is the execution of the very standard of justice. To the point: suggesting that the very standard of justice, justice itself, could in some way be unjust, is incoherent.[87] Beyond this are the data which inform the reader as to the nature of the Canaanites, and the nature of the conquest. Most would agree that it is just to punish evil, and that it is just for the punishment to be in proportion to the degree of evil. In the case of Canaan, many regard the kind of evil practices therein (child-sacrifice[88] and incest) (1 Kgs 11:7; 14:24; 2 Kgs 3:27; Deut 9:5; 12:31; cf. Lev 18:21; 20:2) as so reprehensible as to merit the judgment described in Scripture. The notion of innocence simply does not apply – there was need

[87] This relates to the sovereignty of God, which is all-encompassing. It is as important to understand that God, as the creator of all life, is sovereign in both sustaining it and taking it *in whatever manner* He should choose, in accordance with his sovereign judgment (cf. Piper, 2010).

[88] Ngo (2018) notes the growing controversy after the 1970s regarding the historical validity of child-sacrifice in Canaan. However, Ngo (2018) cites recent developments around the analysis of archaeological evidence strongly corroborating child-sacrifice as customary in Canaan.

for justice. Nevertheless, it was to be justice executed only after centuries of such reprehensible behaviour, whereupon the fullness of their sin was reached (Gen 15:16). However, the reality that not all the Canaanites were exterminated in the conquest must also be reconciled (Josh 14:12-15). Copan (2011:258-260) explains that this indicates that the conquest account employs "Exaggeration Rhetoric" in accordance with "ancient Near Eastern contemporaries"; that the terms *utterly destroy* or *annihilate* (*haram* warfare) formed part of "conventional warfare rhetoric", and that consequently, the terms should not be read literally, and indeed cannot, since Canaanites remained after the conquest. Finding agreement with Richard Hess (Old Testament scholar), Copan (2011:266-268) continues, explaining that the extermination motif was directed at "Canaanite religion" and combatant forces, also qualifying that the specific directive "men, women and children" was in fact a "*stereotypical*" generalisation for a town or region (cf. Hess, 2008:29). Craig (2011) disagrees with Copan, specifically on the use of hyperbolic language in the account, commenting that "this answer doesn't seem to me to do justice to the biblical texts", citing 1 Samuel 15:10-16. Craig (2011) maintains, also citing the agreement of Hess that the divine directive was itself literal, just that "no women and children were actually killed". However, it is unclear whether Craig has maintained Hess' understanding that the directive "men, women and children" was "stereotypical", not a specific delineation of the targets. Nevertheless, Craig (2011) offers an important emendation that aligns with Hess (cf. 2008:30) and allays speculations over the historicity of the account: "I have come to appreciate as a result of a closer reading of the biblical text that God's command to Israel was not primarily to exterminate the Canaanites but *to drive them out of the land*". Furthermore, "The Canaanite tribal kingdoms were to be destroyed as nation states … There was no command to pursue and hunt down the Canaanite peoples" (Craig, 2011).

In summary, 1) maintaining the historical context, the conquest of Canaan is not inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus, and neither with the gospel reality. 2) There is sufficient reason both biblically and archeologically to maintain that the Canaanite culture was decrepit enough to require the harsh judgment so described in Scripture. 3) There are important nuances to the reading of the conquest account which render such blanket ascriptions of ethnic cleansing, infanticide, or genocide grossly improper. Therefore, the objection citing theological discrepancy between the Old and New testaments is, by way of the most contentious example of the conquest of Canaan, insubstantial.

3.4.4.2 Detail discrepancy

We now briefly consider detail discrepancies relating to historical and scientific evidence. The fall of Jericho and semitic cosmology are respective examples. First, the matter of Jericho's history, which is noted (Mohler Jr., 2013:49) as among the more difficult to reconcile with the biblical account recording its destruction at the hands of Israel (Josh 6:1-27). The miraculous nature of the account evidently adds to the scepticism around its historical accuracy (cf. Josh 6:20). As Matthews (2009:21) objects, "The injection of miraculous intervention … serves the Deuteronomistic Historian's theological agenda". It is as such an "idealized account" (Matthews, 2009:21). But, for reasons discussed in the previous chapter, record of the miraculous in an historical account cannot furnish *a priori* dismissal of said account as historically defunct. Such is tantamount to proclaiming certainty of the non-existence of God. Nevertheless, it is the majority consensus over the time of Jericho's destruction that is mostly at odds with the biblical account (Geisler, 2015:83). Archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon and her findings that Jericho could not have been destroyed later than *ca.* 1550 BC are central to the contention, given that the biblical date of conquest is placed by most conservative scholars at *ca.* 1400 BC (cf. Geisler & Howe, 2008:136).[89] Archaeologist Bryant Wood (1990:45-58) and his findings are depended upon by many conservative scholars in support of the later destruction date, believed to accord with the Joshua account. But an alternative date is presented in the inerrantist camp, whose archaeological and textual merits should be kept in mind. Aardsma (1996), in defence of inerrancy, champions the "lost millennium" view which argues for the destruction of Jericho, as Joshua records it, rather at *ca.* 2400 BC. Aardsma (1996) graphically illustrates the archaeological evidence for a walled city which was destroyed 1 000 years *earlier* than the second millennium BC Jericho remains which are disputed. Aardsma (1996) substantiates the extra millennium textually with reference to an "easily made copy error" in 1 Kings 6:1, explaining that "traditional Biblical chronology has accidentally left out one thousand years" due to this copy error. Either way, the alternatives to Kenyon's date are sufficient to cast doubt on the security of her date for the destruction of Jericho as it corresponds to Joshua. In passing, it must be noted that the nature of the Jericho ruins of the second millennium BC itself comport with the biblical account on several important details (Wood, 1990:58). Ultimately, however, there is simply more to discover and confirm. Mohler Jr. (2013:51) notes the propensity for sudden variability of consensus with respect to the evidence concerning Jericho. Of course, this propensity exists for other historical debates no less.[90]

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[89] Scholarly consensus shifted to Kenyon's view as opposed to archaeologist John Garstang, who earlier concluded after his excavations at Jericho (1930-1936) that the evidence confirmed a dating for the destruction at *ca.* 1400 BC.

[90] As Craig (2015) explains, "our knowledge of the ancient world is *extremely* sketchy, and therefore it is not at all impossible that certain things just haven't come to light, either in secular literary sources or archaeologically". Craig (2015) uses the example of the prior dearth of archaeological evidence for the Assyrian king, Sargon the second, that led many to conclude that the Old Testament's account of him was

On to the matter of semitic cosmology as it relates to scientific cosmology. There is supposed contradiction between the scientific and biblical data on the nature of the earth and the universe. This ties into the popular assumption of dichotomy between science and religion; in this case, that science describes the origin of the universe and the nature of earth in one way, and the Bible entirely another way. It remains a false dichotomy, but nevertheless important to address since it is a common popular level objection to the veracity of Scripture. Ironically, however, until relatively recently there *was* dichotomy on this particular matter. Scripture presupposes that the universe had a beginning (Gen 1:1) and earlier scientific cosmology held that the universe is past eternal. Now, "Not only has a steadfast [eternal] view of the universe been abandoned by many scientists … many scientists also believe the physical universe had a beginning at a point in time" (House, 2016:2041). Far from dichotomy, with the latter as the prevailing scientific cosmology, we have an example of a less obfuscated *consensus* between science and Scripture. But there is more that accords between Scripture and scientific cosmology. Astrophysicist Hugh Ross (2011:72), commenting on Job, explains that its "description of continuous cosmic expansion ranks as one of the most far-reaching and dramatic biblical forecasts of later scientific discovery" (cf. Job 9:8). Moreover, Ross (2011:72-73) notes that the relatively recent discovery of cosmic fine-tuning is also thematic in Job (25:2), and that "Other Bible books identify additional major components of big bang cosmology (Gen 1:1; 2:3-4; Ps 148:5; Isa 40:26; 45:18; Jer 33:25; John 1:3; Rom 8:18-22; Col 1:15-17; Heb 11:3)". As to the age of earth and the universe, Scripture does not make any propositional statements addressing the matter; it simply isn't a doctrinal matter, and so appealing to the doctrine of inerrancy to establish either a "young" or "old" earth is baseless. Regarding how either position (young or old earth) is arrived at, essentially, it is the difference between interpreting the word *יוֹם* (day) in Genesis (1:5-2:3) literally, by *one* definition (a twenty-four hour period), or interpreting the same word literally, but by *several* definitions (twelve hour period; twenty-four hour period; indefinite period) – the definition applied is determined by the context of the various occurrences. Both approaches have their merits (Geisler & Howe, 2008:32-33) but the operation of multiple definitions of "day" appears more consistent with the context of Genesis (1:5-2:3) (cf. Lennox, 2011b:46-48; Ross, 2011:114-117). If this is indeed so, then there is yet more consensus between semitic cosmology and scientific cosmology. However, it is agreed that "in either case it is not a question of *inspiration* of Scripture, but of the *interpretation* of Scripture (and of the scientific data)" (Geisler & Howe, 2008:33). Ultimately, it is sensible to be wary of interpretations in science and interpretations of Scripture, since "Not only are some scientists at fault for fudging the

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an error; "until archaeologists excavating in the region of Corsabad unearthed the *palace* of one Sargon the second".

evidence but theologians are also at fault for adopting interpretations of biblical texts that clearly counter widely accepted perspectives [e.g., geocentrism; flat-earthism]" (House, 2016:2041).

3.4.4.3 Narrative discrepancy

In the consideration of narrative discrepancies, the Gospels are arguably of greatest interest because they record the life and teachings of Jesus. And since there are four different records there are discrepancies at many points. Within the synoptic Gospels there is much *verbatim* agreement, but discrepancy nonetheless.[91] To illustrate that these discrepancies are far from irreconcilable, we address here the discrepancy in the narratives of the centurion's servant (Matt 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10). The central issue between the two accounts is, in one instance (Matthew) there is no mention of any representatives but in the other (Luke) there are. There seems a particularly stark contrast in that Luke (7:6-8) records "friends" relaying the words of the centurion, while Matthew (8:8-9) simply records that the "centurion replied", suggesting unmediated conversation between the centurion and Jesus. Poythress (2012:18) acknowledges that the difficulty is not resolved by appealing to two similar but separate instances, since the centurion's speech is "almost identical" in both instances. Geisler and Howe (2008:334) offer the solution that has achieved the most consensus: "In the 1st century, it was understood that when a representative was sent to speak for his master, it was as if the master was speaking himself". Licona (2017:130) offers the same solution, noting also that the omission is consistent with Matthew's general tendency to compress narratives. Additionally, Licona (2017:130) helpfully appends the historical example of Pompey, who would ordinarily have sent an "emissary" to deliver a speech in his name, choosing rather at one time to appear personally delivering such a speech in defence of his friend, Plancus. The point, ultimately, is that there are insufficient grounds to accuse Scripture of contradiction between these accounts, even if a *full* understanding of the reason for Matthew's omission is not attained – a plausible resolution is sufficient (cf. Poythress, 2012:22, 217).

[91] This touches on the synoptic problem, which considers the original source(s) of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The synoptic problem provides a prime example of the value and limits of the application of redaction criticism (Poythress, 2012:119-120). However, this study agrees with Poythress (2012:122-123) that due to the likelihood of many possible sources now lost (cf. Luke 1:1) the synoptic problem is likely "unsolvable". Even so, there is no problem for providential preservation or inspiration (cf. Poythress, 2012:118, 122). It is therefore sensible to "focus on what the Gospels themselves say" when addressing "apparent difficulties" (Poythress, 2012:122). This is not to say that other historical literature cannot be helpful, for one may glean from literary conventions of that period to resolve some difficulties (cf. Licona, 2017:1-3).

3.4.4.4 Extra-biblical material in the canon

How do we approach what appears to be pseudepigraphic material in the canon? If there is such material in the canon, doesn't that undermine the confidence in having all inspired Scripture canonised? Jude (9; 14) is regularly exampled as an instance where Scripture appears to employ portions of pseudepigraphic works (*The Assumption of Moses/The Ascension or Removal of Moses* [v.9]); *The Book of Enoch* [particularly noteworthy, v.14-15]). Assuming the presence of such material in Jude, two specific questions result, framing a dilemma. 1) Should the works Jude references have been considered divinely inspired and so included in the canon? 2) If the answer to the latter question is No, then should Jude itself be considered uninspired and mistakenly included in the canon? However, this dilemma actually arises from a basic fallacy of association. Two facts demonstrate this. 1) Reference to a narrative found in a pseudepigraphic work need not only be found in that specific work. 2) Not all narratives found in pseudepigraphic works are *ipso facto* false. In substantiation of the first fact as it relates to Jude, Lange *et al.* (2008e:19) are helpful: "Jews had from ancient times *various* traditions of the burial of Moses … the Spirit of God directing him to extract the truth from those traditions" (emphasis added). To substantiate the second fact, closely related to the first, rightly, "All truth is God's truth, wherever it is found" (Geisler & Howe, 2008:549). Therefore, whatever true propositions are in any such pseudepigraphic work qualify for use in divinely inspired works. Granted, "Jude clearly regards the Enoch tradition as authoritative" (Joseph, 2013:480), but the differences between Jude and the *book* of Enoch "are not inconsiderable" (Lange *et al*, 2008e:24). Furthermore, Jude does not "expressly" cite the book of Enoch, so "there is still room to doubt whether Jude knew that book" (Lange *et al.,* 2008e:24). In other words, if Jude does draw from the book of Enoch, he does so prudently, without specific reference to the book itself as authoritative. However, based on the historical accessibility of the book of Enoch at the time of Jude, Schreiner (2003:469) believes it most likely that Jude indeed quoted from 1 Enoch; that Jude "believed the portion he quoted represented God's truth". Schreiner (2003:469) nevertheless agrees that "We do not need to conclude … that the entire book [Enoch] is part of the canon of Scripture". Plainly, there is nothing in Jude's use of the tradition of Enoch, or pseudepigraphic materials, that discredits his writings as divinely inspired or its worthiness of inclusion in the canon. Little as it is, Jude's place is firmly established and is no less important.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have sought to answer the question "What is the nature of, and evidence for, biblical inerrancy?" by way of defining and defending inerrancy. This has taken the form, firstly, of defining terms relevant to a Scripture principle, showing the integral place of inerrancy amidst related terms, and that *unlimited*, or *propositional*, inerrancy emerges most fitting in the context of Scripture's own witness, and early church history. Secondly, identification of the opposition to inerrancy in general and unlimited inerrancy in particular, noting liberal, neo-orthodox, and secular proponents. Thirdly, defence of unlimited inerrancy, primarily by way of deductive argument (with some deviation from Warfield and Hodge), in which the importance/implications of the nature of God and humanity are evidenced, but also by way of inductive considerations (historical and textual); all in view of the arguments raised by the opposition. It is the estimation of this study, after all the above considerations, that unlimited inerrancy is indeed defensible and necessary to an orthodox Scripture principle.

CHAPTER 4
EXPLORING CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT AND APPLYING INERRANCY

4.1 Introduction

Having made a case for unlimited inerrancy as a necessary component to an orthodox Scripture principle in the previous chapter, what follows is a matter of application to the contemporary context. Therefore, the first pertinent question is general to the chapter and is as follows. What is the nature of the contemporary context and how does biblical inerrancy apply? The first part of this two-part question is answered by exploring the nature of the contemporary context (ideologically, specifically, but also assessing what is universal).[92] Firstly, specific cultural ideologies in the contemporary context are engaged. Practically, this study is limited to engaging those ideologies which oppose the notion of objective truth. Scepticism, pluralism, relativism and subjectivism are singled out as the main ideologies with which this study is concerned. These ideologies, in particular expressions, relate to postmodernist epistemology and the "post-truth era" (it is noted that here there is some epistemological progression from modernism), and are as such fundamentally opposed to what inerrancy implies, that is, summarily, objective truth and its accessibility. Considering the fact that Christians are part of a globally increasing pluralistic context where the aforementioned ideologies hold sway, adherence to the doctrine of inerrancy, and the authority of Scripture generally, is at risk, and so too the understanding of the objectivity of Christian faith. Nevertheless, secondly, the desire for and inevitable invocation of objective truth and its accessibility, is what this study understands as universal to the human situation. This is seen with regard to fundamental and universal inquiries over human origin and identity, which posmodernism, and the respective ideologies, cannot satisfactorily answer. In light of the ideological realities, and universal inquires, inerrancy is applied. Here we answer the second part of the two-part question; by showing that inerrancy must be applied with respect to its implications, which may either result in negative or positive application. These implications are described in terms of affirmations: affirming objective truth, by which certain ontological and historical propositions of Scripture are affirmed as objective and accessible, in turn enabling an affirmation of objective faith. Furthermore, the role of the Holy Spirit in the latter process emerges as an interesting point of discussion, as the Holy Spirit functions uniquely with respect to Scripture and in definitive intersection between divine and human ontology. We conclude by addressing the main

[92] So far as the relevant ideologies are concerned, they predominantly relate to Western cultural context, although not exclusively, since these ideologies exist in countries outside of the West too. Also relevant to the contemporary context are questions of origin and identity which are understood as universal human inquiries transcending culture and generation.

research question: To what extent can the evidences for biblical inerrancy prevent doctrinal compromise among believers in a contemporary culture of pluralism? The question must be answered by reflecting on two realities: 1) reasonable application of inerrancy towards objective faith, and 2) sufficient evidence for biblical inerrancy.

4.2 An overview of contemporary context

In some fundamental respects, the contemporary world is no different from the ancient world. It is axiomatic that the enterprise of learning has always been part of the human endeavour. So too is *questioning*, integral as it is to learning. In particular, there are at least two base questions that will remain relevant for every person across all generations and cultures: Where did I come from? and Who am I? These are questions of origin and identity. Answers to questions around meaning, value, and purpose in turn draw from answers given to the base questions of origin and identity which conceivably function as something of a true north. To avoid the perils of infinite regression and self-contradiction, these are questions that are ultimately satiated only by definitive answers, dare one say, definitive answers that are *objectively true*.[93] Alas, the moment one invokes the notion of truth, certain ideological challenges in the contemporary context are brought to bear. De Maeseneer (2006:77) quaintly captures the essence of this contemporary inclination: “More than ever, the question of truth has become questionable”. And yet more so a decade yonder with the emergence of the internationally relevant and rather matter-of-fact term “post-truth”; itself a fitting offshoot of “the epistemological postmodernism that won’t die” (Carson, 2018:3). There is a lot of discussion around postmodern culture as such, but there are also those who would deny that such a thing even exists (cf. Craig, 2008b); any uncertainty is to a degree justifiable considering how difficult postmodernism is to define. Nevertheless, a deep scepticism is at play, one that relativises all truth in the face of diversity – yes, pluralism is its scapegoat. These matters are explored in turn. But ideologies that would skirt around truth, quite at home within postmodernist epistemology, are not, strictly speaking, unique to the contemporary context; apparently truth was also “questionable” from of old. The *verso* of the New Testament manuscript P52 (John 18:36-37) is an enduring testimony to that ancient dialogue concerning truth between Pontius Pilate and Jesus, in which Pilate flippantly asked, “What is truth?” (John 18:37).[94] However much more this question is asked

[93] The appeal is to objectivity, which is “associated with ideas such as reality, truth and reliability” (Mulder, n.d.). By extension, this study, unless otherwise qualified, understands truth as that which corresponds or conforms to reality, to that degree being reliable, which accords with the “primary New Testament emphasis” of truth (Nicole, 1992:293).

[94] It is interesting to note here again that P52, by virtue of it being as early as it is, casts a sizable question mark on the Hegelian dialectic applied to the New Testament, which depended upon a late date of John, motivating the paradigm of thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Furthermore, this dialectical paradigm is prevalent in postimodernism, as for example in the case of Jacques Derrida (cf. Jacobs, 2006:76), and in

today with derisive sentiment, it remains a question to be taken seriously. This is because, firstly, there are surely many who ask the question seriously, and secondly, those who do not, cannot avoid adhering to some truth-claim(s) (even if the truth-claim is that truth does not exist). So, we proceed by engaging the ideologies laid out above that motivate the latter sentiment, and those questions of origin and identity (and the matters contingent thereupon) pertinent for every person. Due to the scope of this study, it is necessary that this engagement is in broad brushstrokes.

4.2.1 Modernism, postmodernism and the post-truth era

Ironically, any definition of postmodern is a "*modern* definition of postmodern, because postmodernists would say that postmodern can't be defined" (Long, 2010:488). Similarly, as Benson (2013:3983) explains, postmodernism is "Much too varied and amorphous to count as an 'ism' ... [it] is difficult to define because it avoids simple categories". That postmodernism is found in everything from literature to music, art and architecture, is somewhat to blame for the variance Benson mentions. But even in the writings of the figureheads of postmodern philosophy (Jacques Derrida, Jean- François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, to name a few) there is no dominant construction, or affirmation, that *encapsulates* postmodernism. In fact, postmodernism exists more as a denial of the tenets of modernism, which Benson (2013:3983) says "loosely" unites postmodern thinkers – in other words, postmodernism is more *anti*-modern than *post*-modern. There is as such nothing concrete to which it progresses; it is a cobbling together of variables as part of a re-interpretive (or subversive) effort. As Hinkson and Ganssle (2010:126) describe Foucault's endeavour, "he is not trying to establish his own grand theory; rather, he aims simply to subvert those theories presently in place". Similarly, considering Rorty, "[his] pragmatism is such that he is not offering a new theory of truth but that he thinks theories of truth have outlived their usefulness" (Hinkson & Ganssle, 2010:109). Derrida's (1997:21) deconstruction (the name itself is telling) of language (words having no external ontological grounding) and Foucault's (1995:194, 225) considerations of truth as merely a power struggle, would not *present* something as much as *uncover* something; to expose pretence through the dismissal of truth ("truth", or the language which facilitates truth-claim, is reduced to a smuggling device).[95] And considering Lyotard (1984:xxiv), the only one among the group who would venture at a definition of "postmodern", although "simplifying to the extreme", his definition is just as much a denial of

postmodern/postliberal theology, which embraces the expression of synthesis in terms of Hans-Georg Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" (cf. Westphal, 2005:362).

[95] In Derrida's (1997:24) case it is unclear exactly what is uncovered by deconstruction, since he admits that deconstruction "in a certain way falls prey to its own work". It does not appear as much "paradox" as simple contradiction in supposing the "literal meaning of writing as metaphoricity itself" (cf. Derrida, 1997:15).

something: "incredulity to metanarratives".[96] Yet, Derrida (1997:13) speaks of some dependence on the metaphysical, where a "sign"[97] is "united" to the "absolute logos", which is "the face of pure intelligibility". Derrida (1997:13) continues: "it is not a question of rejecting these notions; they are necessary and, at least at present, nothing is conceivable for us without them". Nevertheless, it appears Derrida (1997:14) is tacitly hopeful that something will be conceivable without appeal to signs and an "absolute logos": "The age of the sign is essentially theological … Its historical *closure* is, however, outlined". It is easy to see why "The so-called 'debate' around 'postmodernism', 'postmodernity' and 'the postmodern' is probably most distinguished for its confusion" (Bennington, 1994:172). Furthermore, Bennington's (1994:172) estimation is sensible: "Perhaps the disagreement *is* all that is going on". Rightly, "if disagreement (or dissensus) be taken as a sign of the postmodern, then it would indeed seem reasonable not so much to look for a 'true state of affairs' behind that disagreement as to take the disagreement as the true state of affairs" (Bennington, 1994:172). Indeed, if the attempt is ultimately to deny truth itself, what *could* be affirmed? Now, epistemologically, it is clear that modernism is very much the antithesis of postmodernism, as modernism upholds the existence of objective truth and its knowability.[98] The antithesis is felt, for Western society certainly, because of how modernism has dominated into the twentieth century. But there is a burden of proof for the one who would suppose postmodern epistemology was *born* in revolt to modernism – the postmodern sentiment certainly seems to have existed independently of modernism.[99] Davidson (2013) has summarised well the ancient roots of some fundamental elements of postmodern epistemology. Davidson (2013) traces "moral relativism" or the idea of "right and wrong [as] human interpretations" to the ancient Greeks, Protagoras and Herodotus, and the ancient Roman, Sextus Empiricus; the denial of objective truth not only to Kant and Nietzsche but to Plato and Socrates; the denial of objective *experience* of the world likewise to Plato. Zacharias' (2010:36) reflection on a statement made by his Indian colleague is furthermore telling: "India just leap-frogged over modern, moving from the premodern to the postmodern. In the West, objective truth has been displaced … In the East, displacement of objective truth was not felt because the cultural focus was elsewhere". But Craig (2008b) contends

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[96] Interestingly, Lyotard (1978:xxiv) grounds his definition on scientific advances, which is very much modernist: "This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it".

[97] Derrida presents the mediaeval definition of "sign" by way of Jakobson: "'*aliquid stat pro aliquo'*" (something stands for something else), Jakobson identifying that this understanding is put forward as "'still valid and productive'".

[98] As for example with René Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, to whom "modern learning is indebted for some of the most potent factors in its advancement … in Epistemology, the grounding of scientific law on the existence of a true God" (Sewall, 2011:7). But even naturalism is built upon modernism, for it contends that what is natural is objectively true, and knowable; that "scientific Law" is grounded in something natural and empirically verifiable.

[99] Illustrating that postmodernism cannot simply be chronologically demarcated as a development of the latter half of the twentieth century out of modernism is Bennington's (1994:177) engagement with a peculiar modal tension that Lyotard himself presents: "'the postmodern is undoubtedly part of the modern' … and, in a sense, *prior* to the modern".

that "Western culture, as the stepchild of the Enlightenment, remains at heart deeply modernist and so must be addressed as such". Craig (2008b) qualifies that relativism is not maintained with respect to the hard sciences, rather "people are relativistic and pluralistic in matters of religion and ethics". Craig (2008b) continues: "that's not postmodernism; that's modernism! That's just old-line verificationism, which held that anything you can't prove with your five senses is a matter of personal taste". However, it is unclear whether it is all that simple. Western culture may have deep modernist heritage, but it has not remained as deeply modernist. One may even grant that Western culture is presently more modernist than anything else, but account must be taken of its trajectory, which appears very much towards postmodernism. Perhaps nothing better testifies to this trajectory than the so-called "post-truth era". It is readily noted (cf. Murray, 2018:12; Lambert, 2016), with concern, that the term "post-truth" was Oxford Dictionaries "Word of the Year 2016" (Anon, 2016). The following qualification was given: "The term has moved from being relatively new to being widely understood in the course of a year – demonstrating its impact on the national and international consciousness" (Anon, 2016). Although interest in the term was likely sparked by Western politics (Brexit and the passed United States presidential election), the popularisation of the term surely reflects broad resonance with post-truth sentiment as a contemporary reality.[100] Importantly, this sentiment is manifestly not unique to the political arena, but exists even in the scientific community. Lambert (2016), writing on the impact of the post-truth era on sport science, explains that "truth has lost its status", and that this trend is "well characterised in all sectors of society, not only in politics". Particularly concerning for Lambert (2016) are "predatory journals" (mimical journals with haphazard to no peer-review process), which he believes threaten the "scientific process" normally involved in fact-checking scientific research papers. Similarly, Metz (2016:6), writing on "Science Practice in the Post-Truth Era", explains the need to reverse the "troubling trend" of the careless dissemination of falsehoods "by challenging students to engage in evidence-based argumentation". There is also nothing specifically political in the *definition* of post-truth: "Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Lexico, 2019). Notably, however, the latter definition does accord well with "one of the slogans of postmodernity" as Nyquist (2010:258) relays: "Truth is relative, history is being rewritten, and experience is the judge of all things". There is evidently a connection between postmodernism and the post-truth era. Hinkson and Ganssle (2010:100) observe something important to the development of the connection: "Postmodernism in general culture is the effect of the trickle down from postmodern theory". It is likely that the post-truth era is the most recent evidence of such a trickling down. Indeed, by some "Foucault's thought is held to be directly or indirectly responsible for the onset of the post-truth disposition, because of

[100] The popularisation is perhaps best condensed in a work by the cartoonist, Martin Shovel (2016), who pictured René Descartes under the heading "truth" and an indiscriminate individual under the heading "post-truth". René Descartes was captioned professing his famous maxim, "'I think therefore I am'", alongside the indiscriminate individual in turn professing, "I believe therefore I'm right!".

his anti-foundationalist approach that undermines both the truth claims of modern science and the legitimacy of liberal-democratic regimes" (Prozorov, 2019:18). One arrives again at the power struggle that would, according to Foucault (1995:194), *create* "truth". Practically, in this conception, "truth" is left to the community that has the most individuals banded together, thereby declaring *their* "narrative" (perspective/experience/feeling) loudest. This is the point: nothing else can be done without a metanarrative, or appeal to objective reality/truth. Hicks' (2015) summary of postmodernism's anti-philosophical (or anti-objectivist) bent illustrates the point:

> Once we set our reality and reason aside, what's left? Well, we have our feelings … Where do these feelings come from? Well, they're determined, either biologically or environmentally. In either case, I am not individually in control of my feelings; I am a product of my group membership … there is no objective standard by which to mediate those different feelings … Nasty political correctness then makes perfect sense, that's how you impose your group's agenda on other groups

It is precisely the above that is manifest in the post-truth era. As McIntyre (2018:172) warns: "The danger of post-truth is not just that we allow our opinions and feelings to play a role in shaping what we think of as facts and truth, but that by doing so we take the risk of being estranged from reality itself". Murray (2018:23) provocatively implies that the danger has already befallen Western culture: "Post-truth has now blossomed into a Culture of Confusion. Confusion is embraced as a virtue and clarity shunned as a sin. The answers to life's questions no longer need to correspond to reality". Blunter is Trueman (2016), who calls the new Western culture "anti-culture". Commenting on the rise of an insidious political correctness Trueman (2016) presents his insight: "Culture did not bring that about. Anti-culture did – the wholesale repudiation of the past and its institutions and interdicts, and a Devil-may-care attitude to the future". After all, what is history if reality is up for reinterpretation? As the postmodern slogan goes, "… history is being rewritten …" (cf. Nyquist, 2010:258).

At this point, we must isolate and engage three of the core complimentary ideologies found within postmodernism, namely, scepticism, relativism (to which subjectivism relates), and pluralism, which by themselves are complex and, in certain instances, dangerous.

4.2.1.1 Scepticism

Considering postmodernism's relationship to scepticism presents an incompatibility, both because postmodernist epistemology accommodates self-contradiction and because there are degrees of scepticism. Explanation is afforded by way of modernism. It is clear enough in modernism that there is scepticism towards the supernatural; nevertheless, the scepticism according to which modernism operates can be quenched by verification.[101] Klein (2015) would call the latter "ordinary incredulity", where whatever the instance of doubt "1. The alleged grounds for doubt could be shown to be false; or 2. It could be shown that the grounds for doubt, though true, can be neutralized". This is the kind of scepticism behind the colloquial mantra "seeing is believing"; it is largely benign, and in fact helpful to learning. Now, Klein (2015) distinguishes such "ordinary incredulity" from "philosophical skepticism"; the latter rooted in ancient Greek philosophy (e.g., Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus representing Pyrrhonian Scepticism; Carneades representing Cartesian or Academic Scepticism).[102] It is with respect to philosophical scepticism (particularly, Academic Scepticism) that postmodernism finds its place – a much deeper and dangerous scepticism (cf. Davidson, 2013). But the incompatibility with this scepticism emerges when considering that the postmodern, while denying that the world (or external objects) can be objectively known (that one could possess objective truth), simultaneously *believes* the world to be a certain way. In other words, the extreme scepticism is there, just not consistently applied; one might call this the populist outworking of postmodern epistemology. In light of the above, Dever's (2010:205) observation with respect to postmodern culture is analysed: "There's no doubt that old modern skepticism is on the wane. Beliefs seem to be filling the air again". Dever is right in the sense that postmodern epistemology does not care for verification (and therefore certainly incompatible with "modern skepticism"), although it must be maintained that a measure of the deeper scepticism, as discussed above, is on the rise with postmodern culture. And it is true that, classically, the "postmodern school" is "famous for its skepticism about 'grand narratives' or world-view based thinking" (Frame, 2008:88); such is the principal target of its scepticism, which has evidently "trickled down" into Western culture. This is the kind of scepticism that is, at least in part, behind the proportional rise in secular scepticism along with orthodox Christianity, that Keller (2018:xi) observes. Such a sceptic, compelled to believe *something*, often chooses

[101] This in fact relates to "The original meaning of the Greek word from which 'skeptic' is derived [which] denotes one who inquires into the truth of things or who wishes to gain knowledge about some subject matter" (Landesman & Meeks, 2003:1).

[102] Klein (2015) explains Pyrrhonian Scepticism as properly agnostic and Academic Scepticism is resolutely sceptical. The example is given of an epistemically interesting proposition, *P* (the external world can be known). Pyrrhonian Scepticism would neither affirm *P* nor deny *P*, while Academic Scepticism would deny *P*. The latter scepticism could also be described as Global Scepticism "the thought that we are mistaken about all or almost all of the knowledge claims we make in daily life, in science, and in other areas of human concern" (Landesman & Meeks, 2003:4). On the whole, however, "philosophical skepticism is alive and well" (Landesman & Meeks, 2003:6).

"noninstitutional, personally constructed spirituality" (Keller, 2018:xxi). Such "spirituality" is developed more in description of what is believed than in justification of the basis of said belief(s).

4.2.1.2 Relativism and subjectivism

Hicks (2015), outlining postmodernism, explains that "in [its] epistemology we have a deep scepticism, as a result of that, we get the relativisms". It does seem that scepticism to a degree facilitates relativism. The latter notion is bolstered by Lewis' (2013:4243) observation: "What do postmodern philosophies and postliberal theologies hold in common with the enlightenment thought they seek to replace? Relativism. You know your truth, I know my truth, but neither of us knows *the* truth".[103] Although Locke's empiricism and Descartes's rationalism upheld reason as something reliable enough to attain objective truth (cf. Locke, 2011a:167; Veitch, 2011:60), the Enlightenment represented a general scepticism of the supernatural and religious, opening the way for modernism's relativisation of religious belief.[104] Postmodernism, adhering to a deeper scepticism, manifests a deeper relativism. To the postmodern, not only is religious belief relative, but truth itself is relative, and as such no appeal to reality through reason and/or revelation is accepted in validating one religion above another, since no appeal to reality is deemed possible – this is *normative* or *totalistic* relativism. The postmodern simply adjudicates by feeling and personal experience, or otherwise by what is pragmatic, all of which, to the postmodern, is traced back to the individual's disposition (culturally; linguistically; religiously; etc.) within relative communities. As Rorty (2008) professes:

> We can tell you about justification, but we can't tell you about truth; there's nothing to be said about it … justification is relative to an audience and to a range of truth candidates, truth isn't

[103] Lewis (2013:4245), after noting how modernism relativises religious belief, goes too far in attributing "totalistic relativism" to modernism; suggesting that modernism, like postmodernism, denies "any objective, universally valid human knowledge". The latter does not follow from modernism's religious relativism; modernism's faith in the hard sciences demonstrates its assent to the acquisition of objective knowledge/truth.

[104] Newbigin (1989:1-2), in agreement with Graf Reventlow, notes the popular conception of the "overturn" of the Christian worldview in western Europe at the hands of modern science, but that this overturn originated "in the strong humanist tradition" inherited "from the classical Greek and Roman elements in our culture". The Christian overtones present in the "great thinkers" at the beginning of the modern era, Newbigin (1989:4) explains, were at loggerheads with the humanist tradition which "proved the stronger of the two". Newbigin's (1989:5) summary of the eventual outworking of humanism's triumph seems accurate enough: religion was reduced to a mere "fact of human life", where "the things which religious people believe in are not facts in that [objective] sense. Only what can stand up under the critical examination of modern scientific method can be taught as fact, as public truth: the rest is dogma". Here too, then, is the makings of the privatisation of religion, now commonplace.

relative to anything; just because it isn't relative to anything, there's nothing to be said about it.

Aside from the fact that Rorty has actually said something about truth (namely, that it isn't relative to anything), the above amounts to saying that truth, relating to nothing in reality, is itself relative; inexorably bound to the relativity in the respective "audiences". Alas, the metanarrative is done away with, and what remains are an indeterminate number of "*petit récit*" (little narratives), from which, according to Lyotard (1984:60), science itself must draw for innovation in the human situation. The relative "narratives" are therefore not maintained for the conveyance of truth but for pragmatic value: they "allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand, to define its criteria of competence and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed within it" (Lyotard, 1984:20). By extension: "knowledge has no final legitimacy outside of serving the goals envisioned by the practical subject, the autonomous collectivity" (Lyotard, 1984:36). It is clear how the latter is unaccommodating to knowledge of the metaphysical; it accommodates rather present-future politicking. Relativism's popularity in "more recent decades" "as an idea underwriting normative-ethical and political-outlook" (Baghramian & Carter, 2015) is therefore understandable. But if truth and knowledge are consigned to these relativist conceptions, it is difficult to see how their outworking could amount to anything aside from the power struggle Foucault (1995:194, 225) sees. If truth and knowledge are so consigned, the scientific innovation Lyotard would maintain cannot draw inspiration from the intrinsic value of individuals in any given community, but merely from the need to maintain certain socio-political constructs in the face of opposing socio-political constructs. After all, "our *self* does not amount to much" (Lyotard, 1984:15).[105]

Now, considering the individual who makes truth-claims (or holds beliefs) based on feeling and experience is invariably part of some "autonomous collectivity", it is clear that the communal is augmented by the subjective. And so, relativism facilitates subjectivism. Whether or not the individual's feelings are the product of communal disposition, in a society that declares truth relative – as prone to change as feeling itself – the individual is encouraged to determine truth as

[105] The matter becomes convoluted when considering the "ontological turn" of politics, emerging from "political theorists operating explicitly in the post-Nietzschean legacy" (Johnson, 2010:83). Johnson (2010:83) here notes such political thinkers following the postmodernists, Foucault and Derrida. This "ontological turn", Johnson (2010:83) says is "marked by open reflection on the nature of human being and reality" – the emphasis, Johnson (2010:85) notes, is upon irreducible diversity in the human situation, as opposed to the liberal emphasis on unity. The problem with this reflection is that it comes by way of postmodern epistemology which while considering human ontology and reality diminishes it. For example, considerations on reality entail its denial; considerations on the "self" as only the product of social variables (as "plural", involving "inner multiplicity" [Johnson, 2010:86]) leaves no standard by which the value of the "self" is determined.

they see fit. Furthermore, maintaining that truth is relative logically includes differing truth-claims between *individuals* within the same community, not just differing truth-claims between different communities. Therefore, as much as postmodernism might attack the modernist notion of autonomy (cf. Lyotard, 1984:15), practically its epistemology reinforces it, engendering an extreme autonomy where the individual sees no need to even question their beliefs with reference to members in the community, or those outside it, or indeed to those in history.[106] In a society that declares truth relative, *particularly* the notion of "ultimate Truth", as De Maeseneer (2006:77) highlights, becomes not a matter of "orthodoxy", but of "aesthetic criteria". "The question is not if it is *true*, but if it is *authentic*. Regarding religion, the norm is no longer defined by what is true, but by what can serve as an authentic expression of the own subjective creativity" (De Maeseneer, 2006:77). While under modernism religious truth-claims are relativised, it is clear that postmodernism facilitates an extreme in doing likewise.[107]

4.2.1.3 Pluralism

At its most fundamental level, pluralism seeks not only to acknowledge but to accommodate diversity (cultural; religious; philosophical; linguistic; racial; etc.) within a society.[108] So conceived, pluralism is increasingly unavoidable (even if deemed ultimately impractical by some), good in fact, so far as the diversity involved remains civil. However, pluralism's ideological extrapolations, more readily seen with respect to religious pluralism, resemble normative relativism – here is the danger. First, we must face the contemporary reality of pluralism (especially in the former sense) as a global phenomenon inherently involving all socio-cultural aspects of human life, and what has instigated this pluralism. Johnson (2010:1) speaks of pluralism as part of an ongoing "conversation", which, in the contemporary context has reached "high volume", since "virtual cornucopias of cultures, philosophies of life, communities of belief, and ways of being are trying to live together in single western political societies, and in an increasingly connected global world". It

[106] Murray (2018:64) relates, describing the "Culture of Confusion" as "fueled by our desire for autonomy"; an "unfettered human autonomy – to become as God". Zacharias (2010:35) draws similar parallels between autonomy and postmodernism: "the individual's move to the transcendental. That is, he is his own divine being".

[107] It is important to qualify that descriptive relativism should be maintained, which concerns abstracts and not truth-claims. For example, one culture's expression is different relative to another's; one language set has features different relative to another's, both nevertheless serving communication. Religions, however, are different, since truth-claims fundamental to one often *contradict* truth-claims fundamental to another. Unfortunately, the populist tendency is to extrapolate the relativity in abstractions to mean relativity between the truth-claims of different religions.

[108] This conception of pluralism relates to a more Lockean liberalism, which is "liberalism as a universal regime" or "moral ideal" (cf. Johnson, 2010:14). There is relation also to what Hobson (2014:15) names "Liberal Theology B"; "the tradition that affirms a deep affinity between the gospel and political and cultural liberty".

is the “increasingly connected global world” (globalisation) that is largely behind this pluralism. Globalisation, as McFaul (2006:199) explains, “is a relatively recent human phenomenon made possible by the expanding worldwide web of global communications and mass transportation”. McFaul (2006:199) agrees that globalisation is a “driving force” towards pluralism. The extent of this force such that McFaul (2006:201) foresees from the middle of the twenty-first century a “megatrend away from exclusivism and toward pluralism”. Specific to McFaul’s (2006:200-201) deliberation over the ever more prevalent “global village” is religious pluralism: “the global village will be trending toward greater interreligious tolerance”; “Tolerance will replace intolerance”. The tone is indeed idealistic. Nevertheless, it is this word “tolerance” that is really the nub in conversations about pluralism, and it is what tolerance has come to mean that demonstrates, perhaps better than anything else, the shift towards ideological pluralism. Duraisingh (1989:vii) several decades ago observed that there was such a shift: “The witness of the church has always taken place within a pluralistic milieu. During recent years, however, new perceptions of this milieu have emerged, and pluralism is fast assuming the character of an ideology”. Newbigin (1989:1) indicates what characterises this shift from a pluralism more happenstance, to ideological: when the plurality involved becomes “celebrated as things to be approved and cherished”. It is one thing to celebrate diversity, various cultural and linguistic abstractions; it is another thing altogether to approve and cherish all philosophies and religions, embodying comprehensive and opposing truth-claims. Consider ideological pluralism applied to religions. There is an immediate absurdity to the idea that an adherent of one religion, *knowing* that the fundamental tenets of their religion are opposed to another religion’s, could nevertheless *approve* and *cherish* the opposing religion. Would a postmodern approve and cherish the tenets of modernism? The absurdity remains, but there are nuances to understand concerning why ideological pluralism is gaining ground even in the face of this absurdity. In doing so we come back to the matter of tolerance (and, in fact, postmodernism), specifically what Carson (2012:16) calls the “new tolerance”. Quite distinct from the original Lockean tolerance,[109] Carson (2012:74) summarises this “new tolerance” and the reason for its emergence eloquently: “if in its most aggressive forms postmodernism has declined, it has left a residue of subjective eclecticism that fosters the elevation of tolerance to the enthroned status of supreme virtue”. So, tolerance, as opposed to being a means to an end in facilitating willing assent, as Locke (2011c:9) would have it, has become an end in itself. The aforementioned absurdity, then, begins to dissolve with the understanding that those who may profess adherence

[109] Locke (2011c:7, 9), true to his liberalism, defends religious tolerance in an agreeable fashion, in that as he does so he explicitly affirms the exclusivity of Jesus, and the gospel’s ability to convict the consciences of those of different religious persuasion, without the enforcement of governing authority. “The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion, is so agreeable to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind, as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it” (Locke, 2011c:7). Locke (2011c:9) continues: “there being but one truth, one way to heaven; what hopes is there that more men would be led into it, if they had no other rule to follow but the religion of the court”.

to a religion while also maintaining ideological pluralism under the banner of tolerance likely do so favouring the latter at the expense of their religion or beliefs. In other words, the real allegiance is not to the belief system, but to tolerance, manifesting as ideological pluralism.[110] What is "celebrated", "approved" and "cherished", is not opposing religions and philosophies, but the idea that one can pick and choose beliefs without accountability to objective truth. And belief is cheap if religion is reduced to "subjective creativity", as De Maeseneer (2006:77) puts it – indifference, then, is understandable. Ideological pluralism is as favoured as it is because, in true postmodernist fashion, it trivialises objective truth to make subjective preference absolute, thereby qualifying "tolerance".[111] And if the latter sentiment is questioned, the appeal is to scepticism over whether objective truth can be known by virtue of the fact that there is an extensive plurality of claims to objective truth (in the case of religions). In light of the above, Johnson's (2010:8) observation makes perfect sense:

> Tolerance can turn into indifference if one ceases to view a particular behaviour or belief with disapproval, or into skepticism if one declines to pass judgment on another's way of life or beliefs because one questions the existence of a right or a standard by which to pass such judgments.

So, indifference to one's own or another's religion (in part or as a whole) and scepticism that any religion could be objectively true betrays the operation of ideological pluralism, and it finds colloquial expression as "tolerance". As Carson (2012:76) once more affirms, "The new tolerance … has become a supreme virtue, if not *the* supreme virtue, of much of the Western world and beyond".

It would be naïve to think that Christians, exposed to these ideological tides as they certainly are, are not pressured to capitulate in some way. A case in point is Strange's (2018:5) concern in approaching the relatively recent development of "multi-faith civic events". Strange (2018:6) reflects on a particular event: the "National Memorial Service at St Paul's Cathedral in London for the victims of the Grenfall Tower fire where seventy-one people had died including a large number of Muslims". Concerning for Strange (2018:6) was that "Muslim schoolgirls sang a song called

[110] This kind of tolerance is also seen in the theological liberalism that Hobson (2014:12) identifies as "Liberal Theology A", which in accord with rationalistic Enlightenment principles, relativises religious truth-claims. Hobson (2014:15) believes this kind of liberal theology still survives in "'progressive'" churches.

[111] The parallels to the post-truth era are also apparent. The post-truth era itself understood to have been ushered in by globalisation, particularly by the exponential growth of global communications in the form of social media or "alternate media" (Prozorov, 2018:18; cf. Lambert, 2016).

‘Insha Allah’” in the service. Strange (2018:6) continues, explaining that the “rationale” given for the inclusion of such a song was that “as an established church ministering to the whole community over an extraordinary and very public tragedy, [the song] was believed to be making a reasonable adjustment without compromising the truth of the faith”. Strange (2018:6) concludes, justifiably, that despite the rationale “it *did* compromise the truth of the faith”. From an evangelical’s perspective the reality should be plain; what was permitted at this local church was the worship of a false god in the name of sympathy. Rightly, “our theology of religions cannot be syncretistic, neither will we want to be *perceived* as being syncretistic to a watching world” (Strange, 2018:5). These ideological tides, ever more prevalent, would readily pull the church at large into syncretism – it is not a struggle unique to the Western church. As Burrus (2012) proffers, “might the creative and ongoing process of religio-cultural syncretism – something simply taken for granted by sociologists, anthropologists, or historians – be embraced rather than repressed and denounced as heretical?” This statement after approving the syncretistic heritage of Asian countries and the call to syncretism by Korean born theologian, Junehee Yoon, and Sri-Lankan born theologian, Wesley Ariarajah, among others (cf. Burrus, 2012). The same tide is evident in South Africa, as exampled by Gerrie Lubbe (2015:225), who relays the impression of one newspaper editor at a particularly momentous “interfaith” meeting in 1994: “‘Four religions, many tongues, one prayer’”. Could an observer say to whom the “one prayer” is prayed? Might not the observer conclude, “The Absolute does not matter, so long as diverse voices united can prevail against atrocity”?

4.2.2 A thirst unquenchable: questions of origin and identity

Clearly, the notion that the truth does not matter, so long as what is believed works to accomplish a desired end, has become a common sentiment. All the while, the painter needs a firm canvas; the artist a reliable medium; yes, even the postmodern architect needs a sure foundation. Broadly speaking, the individual needs a sure point of reference to maintain orientation. Murray (2018:11) illustrates with a very relatable situation:

> You’ve been at an intersection before, waiting for the red light to change, and had that uneasy feeling: *Is the bus next to me moving forward or am I in reverse?* The first thing you do to regain clarity and overcome the quick flash of vertigo is look at something that doesn’t move – a mailbox, or the streetlight perhaps Getting a fixed point of reference clears up your confusion and relieves the vertigo.

Quite unhelpfully, the trend in absolutising the relative ultimately leaves a wildly volatile landscape (physical and metaphysical) to reference. And in a context that declares that there is no objective truth, inquiry cannot function to achieve any real end. The dilemma emerges when noting that questions (those intended for information and/or clarification) indicate the need for orientation, which is achieved by means of answers. If answers are denied their basis in or correspondence to truth, how can they ultimately serve to orient the questioner? Moreover, if the need for answers to correspond to what is actual is dismissed, the next step is dismissing the need for answers to maintain coherence. Zacharias (2010:25-26), recounting his conversation with a student, relays exactly the latter progression in operation. After providing one sociologist's (Daniel Bell) definition of culture as the "'effort to provide a coherent set of answers to the existentialist situations that confront all human beings'", Zacharias (2010:25) was met with the question, "Who told you culture is a search for coherence?". Upon Zacharias' (2010:26) qualification that it was another's definition indicating the need for coherence, the student responded, "Ah! Words! Just words!"; to which Zacharias rejoindered, "Do you want my answer to be coherent?". The student, persisting, replied, "But that's language, isn't it?" (Zacharias, 2010:26). Of course, Zacharias (2010:26) recognises that the problem lay with the assumption that language itself has no "referent"; that is, that language cannot correspond to reality. It is par-for-the-course that correspondence and coherence be undermined if language itself is undermined by way of its reliability in conveying truth.[112] And it makes sense that language – that which makes propositional statements/answers possible – is undermined in line with the postmodernist assertion that objective truth does not exist, or cannot be apprehended.

All the while, questions are asked, and many who ask, hopeful of credible answers with which to orient themselves. Among the most important of questions asked are those that relate to origin and identity. The questions "Where did I come from?", and "Who am I?" (metaphysical/ontological questions), and their like, invariably relate to each other; to answer the one is essentially to answer the other. Lennox (2014) explains succinctly: "Interest in origins is vastly important, for a very, very simple reason: it's that a person without a past is a person without an identity". Therefore, the answers to questions of origin and identity are fundamental to human orientation; they function as true north. As such, they inform all attendant questions of meaning, value, and purpose. All these questions are universal to the human situation, since people necessarily reference answers (some shallowly, some with analysis) given to these questions to determine the course of their life

[112] The scepticism of language is exemplified in Derrida. Derrida's translator, Spivak (1997:vxiii) summarises Derrida's method: "the authority of the text is provisional, the origin is a trace; contradicting logic, we must learn to use and erase our language at the same time". It is unclear exactly what makes the "trace" that Derrida speaks of any more reliable in serving the exercise of use and erasure of language. Nevertheless, to what end? The method is locked into deconstruction as an end, especially since the "trace" is defined in terms of absence (cf. Spivak, 1997:xvii).

(morally, especially). Lennox (2014) keeping the question of origin primary, from general observation attests to the universality of the question and its relevance in the minds of people:

> As I travel around the world, I notice that each of us is searching for a bigger story into which we can fit our lives. We have our own story – it's very important. But how does it fit into the rest of the universe? That's why, of course, documentary films, like those of Brian Cox and others … about the history of the universe and of humanity, are enormously popular … there is a restless search of the human mind, and intellect, and heart for meaning; and the bigger the story we can fit our lives into the more meaning we discover in them.

Zacharias (2017) in turn points out a commonplace deficiency in people's sense of meaning: "I travel [to] campuses all over the globe, and I find young people coming and telling me the same thing: 'struggling with meaning'; 'struggling with meaning'". Surely, under postmodernism there can be no hope of quenching this thirst – it is postmodernist sentiment that is largely to blame for the prevalence of this thirst. Under postmodernism there is no "big story" to speak of; the individual, surrounded by a shifting sea of "little narratives", has no metanarrative to anchor in. However strange it is that Lyotard (1984:xxiv) assigns scientific progress (no doubt, he is thinking in terms of naturalism) responsible for the displacement of the metanarrative, he is right to imply that naturalism presupposes an origin of humanity that offers no ultimate meaning, value or purpose. As Dawkins (1995:133) puts it, "at bottom, no design, no purpose … nothing but blind, pitiless indifference". The metanarrative naturalists proffer to humanity might be summarised as follows: From nothing you came, and to nothing you are ultimately purposed; you are cosmic dust and your value is as such. Since naturalism offers "nothing" as its metanarrative, it really offers no metanarrative of any substance. Nevertheless, another tremendously popular naturalist, Stephen Hawking (2018:3), acknowledges the prevalence of the metaphysical/ontological questions at issue: "People have always wanted answers to the big questions. Where did we come from? … What is the meaning and design behind it all?". Hawking (2018:3) continues fittingly: "The creation accounts of the past now seem less relevant and credible". It is a marvel how naturalism is deemed able to even *approach* relevance and credibility if its answer to these questions is ultimately "Nothing". In a manner that demonstrates the parallels between postmodernism and naturalism, Murray (2018:170) condenses Plantinga's important observation: "naturalistic evolution entails that our beliefs aren't based on whether they're true, but on how they help us survive and propagate our species. Thus, the truth or falsity of our beliefs, including those derived through science, is irrelevant". Therefore, it is not scientific progress that comports with postmodernism, as Lyotard would have it, rather it is naturalism that so comports. There are differences, of course, but both naturalism and postmodernism are content to describe humanity in terms of ultimate meaninglessness. Normative relativism is then the only recourse, manifesting as the power struggle of one over another. Lennox (2015:55) confirms as much, noting the severity of the relativistic trend: “The wave of relativism now swamping Western thinking has increased the pressure to drop certain words from our languages and replace them with others that drive forward the secularist agenda of deconstructing the very nature of human beings”. C. S. Lewis, in his book, *The Abolition of Man,* is remarkably prophetic with respect to the sentiment manifest in the latter trend, engaging throughout what may as well be the postmodern condition. As Lewis (2001e:59) warned all those years ago (1944), “the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means … the power of some men to make other men what *they* please”. Zacharias (2010:36) confirms Lewis’ observation by exampling the United States’ historic denunciation of Saddam Husain’s “word games”, highlighting the irony considering this denunciation came from a country with such proclivity to postmodernism. “We arrogate to ourselves moral authority and deny referents to words, except when we deal with others who play the same game”, Zacharias (2010:36) concludes. Zacharias’ summation is a poignant summary of the postmodern condition overall.

Ultimately, in the relativistic power struggle, the answers to the metaphysical/ontological questions at issue come by means of the dictates of autonomy. To the question, “Where did I come from?”, postmodernism through hyper scepticism answers, “No one can really know”; naturalism through reductionism answers, “Nothing”. Neither answer gives any substance with which to answer the question, “Who am I?”. The respective answers to the first question may as well apply to the second. All the while, the individual is left with the experience of *self*. And the individual who assents to postmodernism’s or naturalism’s answer to the question of origin is left to the whims of feeling to define the self; to “deconstruct” and tailor to subjective preference. Is it any wonder that such an individual is left to conclude, “I am who I am”; “I will be who I will be”? Nevertheless, the thirst remains, manifest in the sense of meaninglessness. It is no wonder, since one (finite being) cannot define oneself in terms of oneself,[113] any more than one can pick oneself up by the arm, or create oneself.

[113] The argument is not, of course, that the individual does not reference their context (community), but that, under postmodernism, there is nothing by which to ground essential ontology. Under postmodernism, a group as much as the individual part of that group inevitably appeals to feeling in the determination of belief. There may be collective consensus, but if the standard is not truth, that collective has no basis beyond itself. Individuals who identify themselves with reference to a group that has no basis beyond consensus are merely masking autonomous expression with plurality, such that the declaration is now, “*We* will be who *we* will be”.

4.3 Applying inerrancy

An overview of the contemporary context reveals, on the one hand, ideological trends that dismiss objective truth, and on the other, a desire for objective truth in response to burning metaphysical and ontological questions. Inerrancy (propositional/unlimited) is necessarily applied with respect to these contemporary realities. Importantly, inerrancy, as a description of the nature of Scripture, can only be applied derivatively, by implication of what it affirms. Inerrancy affirms the existence of objective truth; in particular, that the propositions of Scripture, understood in textual and historical context, are objectively true. Beyond the merely historical and scientific propositions of Scripture, the propositions relating to divine and human ontology and to the nature of Christian faith (such propositions deemed universally relevant and changeless) are paramount. [114] In effect, then, what is really applied is Scripture; the objectivity of its propositions. The Christian *practically* applies inerrancy by maintaining the objective truthfulness of Scripture's propositions, in appropriate context. While assent to inerrancy is not essential for salvation, maintaining the objective truthfulness of those propositions that present salvation (and other fundamental doctrines) is plainly crucial.[115] As such, the above ideological trends are not in some way accommodated but displaced by way of a series of reaffirmations to the contrary of these trends, as derived from the propositions of Scripture – one could call this a negative application. Furthermore, Scripture is positively applied to the above metaphysical and ontological questions, which are richly answered in Scripture. Lastly, there emerges from considerations on the application of Scripture, the distinguishing role of the Holy Spirit in applying Scripture to its divinely purposed end; an end more transformative than accommodative.

4.3.1 A reaffirmation of objective truth

At this point it is fitting to invoke the inquiry paradigm of Lamberigts *et al.* (2006:1): "the question of *the nature of theological truth*, and the question of *the determination of theological truth*". Agreeably, these two questions represent the "problematic of theological truth (orthodoxy)" (Lamberigts *et al.*, 2006:1). This study maintains that the nature of theological truth (and by

[114] Following article eight of *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* (ICBI) (1978:9): "the Bible contains teachings and mandates which apply to all cultural and situational contexts and other mandates which the Bible itself shows apply only to particular situations".
[115] Even Craig (2015), when pressed, acknowledges a "strong doctrine of biblical inerrancy" is preferable for the prevention of a "slippery slope" dismissal of other doctrines in Scripture, acting as a "theological safeguard". It must, however, be conceded, as Craig (2015) emphasises, that the improper application of inerrancy proves detrimental to Christian faith. Ehrman (2005:7) stands as a clear example, taking inspiration and inerrancy to mean the *pristine* preservation of Scripture.

implication objective truth)[116] is determined with respect to theology proper, and that the determination of theological truth is by means of Scripture.[117] Yates (2006:17, 25, 29) justifiably calls the latter understanding Augustinian and, on account of Augustine's prolific influence, Reformed. Yates (2006:17) emphasising the anti-Manicheanism of Augustine in his work "*Confessiones"*, notes Augustine's declaration of God as the "'fount of truth'" and Genesis, by virtue of divine inspiration, as a writing which "'supremely corresponds both to the light of truth and to the reader's spiritual profit'". However much the truth of God revealed in the Old Testament needed defending against the distortive antisemitism (*qua* Gnosticism) of the Manicheans, the notion that God is the source of truth and that the Old Testament is inspired and wholly truthful certainly antedated Augustine. Truth, as an attribute of the God of the Old Testament is first affirmed in the Old Testament (Deut 32:4; Ps 31:5; Isa 65:16), and the Old Testament canon is in no uncertain terms affirmed as entirely truthful by Jesus Himself (Luke 11:49-51; 24:27; John 10:35; cf. 13:18; 15:25; 17:12). Therefore, while Augustine was significantly influential in the recognition of the canon as we have it (cf. Yates, 2006:30), such recognition cannot properly be said to have depended on Augustine's intellectual prowess and the subsequent success his writings enjoyed. The case for divine providence in the preservation of the ("correct") canon remains strong; to reference once more the cohesive redemptive history *inherent* to the canon (cf. Köstenberger & Kruger, 2017:117).

Now, it is important to expound divine providence as it relates to truth. It follows that on account of divine providence truth is made accessible. If truth has its basis in God, then God's positioning Himself for disclosure is prerequisite for objective knowledge of Him. Equally, humanity must be endowed with the capacities required to apprehend[118] God, and truth which emanates from Him.[119] As much as God avails the capacities (senses; reason; spiritual relationality; etc.) of humanity towards divine apprehension, those capacities are first *provided* by Him. Likewise, God positioning Himself for disclosure is an act of providence; such a positioning presupposes his provision of *Himself* (cf. Jer 29:13-14). Call it "accommodation", nevertheless, Scripture presents divine *self*-disclosure, and as such the provision of an objective disclosure; a disclosure entirely truthful on account of the One who speaks it (Ps 119:160). Invariably, biblical epistemology esteems God as

[116] The Augustinian statement "all truth is God's truth" (Sproul, 2009) is not mere religious sentiment, it is a statement logically consistent with the understanding of God's infinite ontology. All that is true finds basis in Him irreducibly. As Sproul (2009) summarises the view mutual to Aquinas and Augustine: "all truth meets at the top".
[117] Not to the dismissal of natural revelation (creation), special revelation (Scripture) is the sole harbinger of substantive propositions about the nature of God (*Yahweh*) and humanity in relation to God.
[118] In distinction from *comprehend*. No finite being can completely grasp the infinite.
[119] Lennox's (2011c:73) observation examples this principle in effect: "the very reason science flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, under men like Galileo, Kepler and Newton, had a great deal to do with their conviction that the laws of nature reflected the influence of a divine law-giver".

the referent of knowledge: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools[120] despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7). Of course, postmodern epistemology is every bit the latter’s antithesis. Rorty (2008), while professing truth as something about which nothing can be said/known, appeals also to divine ineffability to bolster his assertion: “Truth with a capital ‘T’ is sort of like God; there’s not much you can say about God”. Ineffabilists would indeed agree, but not without some verbal acrobatics to avoid apparent self-contradiction. Jacobs (2015:159-160), for example, acknowledges the self-contradiction, but attempts to explain it away by creating the distinction “fundamental and non-fundamental truths”.[121] Jacobs (2015:160) continues: “all truths about how God is intrinsically are non-fundamental. He is ineffable in the sense that one cannot assert any true, fundamental propositions about Him”. Clearly, this distinction is at odds with propositional inerrancy, which holds that God communicates his nature Himself, by his Spirit through humanity. Even granting the distinction, how does the ineffabilist defend the divine self-disclosure recorded in Exodus 3:14 as something less than intrinsic to God, or “non-fundamental”? Certainly, the proposition “I AM WHO I AM” communicates a reality that cannot fully be grasped – it is a fundamental reality of God no less. Eternal self-existence (or infinitude for that matter) need not be comprehended to know that it is an attribute *only* befitting God – biblically, the description is objectively true without exhaustive understanding of the reality.[122] In contrast, the radical scepticism native to postmodernism, as Rorty exemplifies, opposes the irreducible complexity afforded by the biblical notion of God as the cause of all existence. There are no grounds for thinking this kind of scepticism is satiated by some simple mechanism, discovered or imaginatively deduced, providing the answer to everything; locked within its method of deconstructing all things, it ultimately offers nothing in return. Lewis (2001e:79-81), describing the trajectory of modern philosophy of science as towards the dismissal not merely of God but of humanity itself, foresaw the latter void end. Lewis (2001e:81) concludes poignantly: “you cannot go on explaining away for ever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on ‘seeing through’ things for ever … To ‘see through’ all things is the same as not to see”. As Zacharias (2010:35) parallels: “the morticians of the Absolute were not content to stab God-talk. Inevitably God’s undertakers were marching to their own funeral, with all of knowledge being pronounced

[120] Lange *et al*. (2008f:45) highlight the word “fools”, paralleling Jeremiah 4:22: “For my people are foolish; they know me not … they have no understanding”. The context of both passages implies a relational knowledge of God from which true understanding flows; failing the former, the capacity for the latter is compromised, God’s people then “refuse and contemptuously repel His salutary discipline” (Lange *et al.*, 2008f:45). Hosea 4:6 also relates the relational sense of “knowledge”, communicating the consequence of its deficiency: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”.

[121] Jacobs (2015:160) distinguishes “fundamental” and “non-fundamental” truths in terms of how a truth/ proposition “maps” onto the “world” (or reality). He considers fundamental truths to map more exactly onto the world, representing the world as it really is (these he calls “special”), while non-fundamental truths map onto the world but only partially represent the world as it really is.

[122]Here we re-affirm the need for a balanced apophatic theology, as expounded in chapter two. There is room for mystery in God on account of his infinitude, but there is also room for objective revelation of God on account of his accommodation to the human situation as evidenced in Scripture.

dead". What results is the colloquialised dismissal of truth: "There is no truth"; "No one can know the truth"; etc. Benson (2013:3988) decries the incoherence of such propositions by way of a simple parody: "'the truth is that there is no truth'". Clearly, the denial of truth involves truth-claim; the individual who attempts to negate truth saws the branch upon which they sit. God as the logical basis of truth is not dismissed by such self-contradictory claims any more than truth itself is. Moreover, Scripture and what it says about God remains something substantial with which to grapple. An honest assessment of Scripture will not permit a sweeping dismissal of its propositions as the trivial human estimations of a bygone era. The first proposition of Scripture is a case in point among the most pertinent: "In the beginning God created" (Gen 1:1). God as Creator has by no means been rendered an irrelevant, insensible, or inaccurate proposition. To the contrary, the scientific community's (broadly speaking) ready relegation of God to the category of unnecessary explanation is increasingly questionable, on account of the emerging insufficiency of naturalistic alternatives recognised within the community itself.[123] Today, Lyotard could much less refer to scientific advances leading to the side-lining of the metanarrative. Indeed, the biblical conception of God as a being spaceless, timeless, beginning-less and immaterial, all of which implied in Genesis 1:1, means that the question of human origin is finally and indubitably answered with respect to Him.

4.3.2 A reaffirmation of humanity

In the words of Lewis (2001e:73), "Only the *Tao*[124] provides a common human law of action which can over-arch all rulers and ruled alike. A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery". Quite obviously, Lewis is defending the grand scheme into which humanity fits and with respect to which humanity ought to live; the metanarrative, in outline. Now, God is the only possible basis of a metanarrative, since He is both the being to whom all truth corresponds (truth, in turn, the *sine qua non* of any expression of meaning, value and purpose) and a being irreducibly personal. Any material origin lacks the personal agency necessary to will and purpose that which proceeds from it. It follows from the biblical account that God, by creating and crowning humanity highest of created beings

[123] Nelson and Klinghoffer (2016) comment on the recent meeting of the Royal Society in London, in which the legitimacy of Neo-Darwinism was examined. "What's really notable … is that such a thoroughly mainstream body should so openly acknowledge problems with orthodox neo-Darwinian theory" (Nelson & Klinghoffer, 2016).

[124] Lewis' (2001e:18) shorthand for "objective value" or moral law: "the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are". Lewis (2001e:18) examples the "*Tao*", which is a Chinese descriptor for moral law, as a sense common among cross-generational and cross-cultural expressions, demonstrating a certain universality to the perception of moral law.

(Ps 8:5-6), wills and purposes humanity to a very particular end. God, who provides physical law for the universe's good order, adds moral law with the capacity of conscience for the good order of his *imago* and as a reflection of higher call. And the moral law is most excellently summed in the greatest two commandments (Matt 22:37-40) which, at the same time as magnifying humanity's autonomous rebellion, reveals a God who intends relationship, not cold imposition. Unfortunately, the moral law is very often construed to mean imposition, and as such its violation is deemed freedom and enlightenment – such is consistent with the capacity of human free will. Biblically speaking, however, the latter is the attendant mind set accompanying autonomous rebellion, which was first exemplified in the Fall narrative (Gen 3). Rightly, Zacharias (2010) takes that which led to the Fall as an example of "pre-ancient" postmodernism. Zacharias (2010) embroiders:

> Postmodernism was at the garden of Eden; when Adam and Eve [were asked] 'Has God really said?'. What did postmodernism do? It questioned propositional truth. Does a statement really mean what it says, or do you fuse your own meaning into any statement? … That's exactly what happened at the garden of Eden; they wanted to play as God.

As much as the decision to rebel was a product of free will, Scripture presents the very opposite of freedom ensuing this autonomous rebellion. What resulted was bondage to sin and death (Rom 5:12). Contemning the command of the Source of life, Adam and Eve in effect attempted to be their own source of life; defining what is good for their being in *contrast* to God. Impossible as it is for a finite being to be its own source of life, it leaves only the prospect of destruction and death. And meaning, value and purpose have no lasting referent if death is the final prospect. All this to say that if humanity persists in such autonomy, there is with it neither freedom nor anything worth being free for. All the while, Scripture extends the possibility of freedom, unsurprisingly only with respect to God and his word (John 8:31-32). Is it any wonder that freedom should be so determined? God as Creator invariably determines both the purpose and potential of humanity, and since humanity is created *imago Dei*, that purpose and potential is determined with respect to God directly; apart from Him neither is fully realised. Hindered purpose and unrealised potential plainly represent bondage. Importantly, it does not follow that the boundaries of potential and purpose, divinely determined as they must be, are for restriction's sake; they exist simply on account of finitude. In fact, humanity has greatest potential if dominion over what is created is assigned to humanity, to say little about all that humanity as the *imago* might involve. And if humanity is purposed for relationship with God, what purpose could be more abundant? Abundance is indeed the appropriate description, particularly after noting the intended ideal of the divine-human relationship. To reference the commandments (Matt 22:37-40) once more, it is clear that that ideal is *love*.

Keller (2018:48) offers an insightful paradox: "What is the environment that liberates us if we confine ourselves to it, like water liberates the fish? Love". Keller (2018:49-50) is building to the unmistakable correlation between love and human freedom, becoming climactic in the gospel. Keller (2018:50) explains that, in Christianity, relationship with God is not "dehumanizing", as though it were a "'one way'" adjustment to God. Keller (2018:50) continues, showing the contrary: "God has said to us, in Christ, 'I will adjust to you. I will change for you. I'll serve you though it means a sacrifice for me.' If he has done this for us, we can and should say the same to God and others". The divine-human relationship, and the love that is to be intrinsic to it, is abundant precisely because God gives Himself *in full*, and calls humanity, the beloved, to do likewise (1 John 4:10, 19; cf. John 14:15, 21-23). There is at the same time no greater affirmation of the value of humanity, though fallen, nevertheless, the *imago*, the beloved, pursued by God throughout redemptive history. Keller (2018:49) is right, "Freedom … is not the absence of limitations and constraints but it is finding the right ones, those that fit our nature". Therefore, to love God, since it accords with what humanity as the *imago* is purposed to, is "the rule which is not tyranny", the "obedience which is not slavery" (cf. Lewis, 2001e:73).

4.3.3 A reaffirmation of objective faith

At its core, the gospel entails the reconciliation of humanity to God (thereby, God's redemption of humanity, and humanity's salvation). This is made possible only by the grace of God through faith in Jesus and his finished work (2 Cor 5:18-19; Eph 2:7-8, 13). That it is a *finished work* needs emphasis, particularly as far as it communicates a *historical event*, and as such relates objectivity. As Geisler and Roach (2011:31) relay Sproul's commentary on the Statement (CSBI): "the Bible is indeed *redemptive* history, it is also redemptive *history*, and this means that the acts of salvation wrought by God actually occurred in the space-time world". Such is the hermeneutical lens of the historical-grammatical method applied to Scripture, which on the basis of correspondence to reality justifiably upholds the historical statements of Scripture as history (cf. Geisler & Roach, 2011:30-31). This is particularly important when considering redemption through Christ, which is communicated retrospectively as *the* seminal historical event (1 Pet 1:18-20; Gal 4:4-5). If the gospel narrative is read as history (which is justified, as per chapter three), the implication for humanity is unavoidably objective. This is mostly because the resurrection of Jesus, as *historical event*, not only validates the redemptive act, but every proposition Jesus made – it validates the gospel, as witnessed to throughout Scripture (Gal 3:8-9), concerning *all* people (cf. John 3:14-16; 1

Tim 2:6).[125] Apart from the resurrection as historical event, “faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14); if the resurrection actually occurred, it is the basis of a *transcendent* hope (1 Cor 15:42-43; Col 1:25-27). Particularly as Scripture advocates this evidence-based faith and hope (cf. Heb 11:1), McDowell (2011) laments a trend he has observed among Christians, namely, the belief that Scripture and what it teaches is true simply because it is believed to be true. Concluding a related dialogue with a young Christian, McDowell (2011) explained the crucial difference: “to you it’s true because you believe it … I believe it because it’s true”. There are obvious parallels to postmodern epistemology – there is no consideration of objectivity. McDowell and McDowell (2017:xxxvii) elaborate the needed distinction with qualification: “The Christian faith is an objective faith; therefore, it must have an object that is worthy of faith. Salvation comes not from the strength of our beliefs, but from the object of our beliefs”. This is not to say that Christian faith is in no way subjective. Inbody (2005) has endeavoured a fair systematic demonstration of Christian faith as both objective and subjective. Importantly, it is clear from Inbody (2005:1) that objectivity takes precedence in order to ground subjective experience: “faith must be personally appropriated to be authentic, [but] it is not derived from the personal experience of Christians” (Inbody, 2005:1). This study does, however, disagree with Inbody’s (2005:42) more neo-orthodox estimation of Scripture as a facet (albeit a significant facet) of ever evolving Church tradition; this tradition, of which Scripture is deemed a part, is identified as the objective standard informing the Christian’s faith. For Inbody (2005:42), Scripture and tradition are, in effect, on the same level (pertaining to the Christian community), neither truly authoritative apart from the Spirit at work in them. But placing tradition and Scripture on the same level is to not sufficiently grapple with the distinctions afforded by the act of divine inspiration, unique to Scripture. Is tradition influential and important? Greatly. But precisely in view of divine inspiration, one cannot simply class Scripture with tradition, *no matter how significantly any given tradition draws from Scripture*. Because Scripture is *first* a product of the Spirit (divine *initiative* in the production of Scripture through humanity), it is wedded to the authority of the Spirit in a way tradition cannot be. The implication is that Scripture is *the* objective standard informing Christian faith[126] (because of the Spirit’s objective vantage), and tradition, drawing from it, is always secondary, and sometimes incongruent. Consequently, it is fitting that Christians *establish* themselves with respect to Scripture (cf. Matt 7:24). And as discussed above, Christians have to maintain what it is they believe against the rising tides of ideological pluralism and postmodernist epistemology. Even the fact of religious plurality as a global socio-cultural experience occasions the need to understand the distinctiveness of Christianity. On this matter, Strange (2018:8) offers a

[125] The gospel throughout Scripture represents a comprehensive communication of the metanarrative to humanity: “the Bible is indeed a metanarrative in that its history, theology, poetry, prophecy, and eschatology are brought together in one big all-encompassing story” (Nyquist, 2010:258).
[126] From which the directive for Scripture’s application naturally follows: “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). Clearly, following divine inspiration, Scripture is the intended standard against which conduct (or tradition) is tested.

practical way forward, bridging “Reformed theology of religions” with “Reformed public theology”: “a stance of subversive confrontation which proclaims the Lordship of Christ horizontally in the context of other ‘religions’ and vertically against the pretensions of ultimacy that come from late-modern liberalism which so often views religion as ‘window-dressing’ but is itself deeply ‘religious’”. There isn’t a more reliable reference for this stance than Scripture, whose divine inspiration furnishes the Christian’s certitude of the nature of God as absolute, and of all that Jesus’ Lordship entails – such doctrines necessitating divine self-disclosure. Therefore, the latter doctrines, together constituting a “subversive confrontation”, are properly maintained by the moorings of Scripture. Liberal and neo-orthodox conceptions, variously debasing the authority of Scripture, would sooner capitulate, or creatively accommodate, than remain in “subversive confrontation”.[127] So too postmodern and post-liberal theologies, though advocating the metanarrative, they are rendered unstable by assenting to the postmodern notion that objective truth cannot really be obtained, citing the “theory-ladenness of all observation and description” (Patterson, 2004:4).[128] Now, the latter point merits digression to embroider on an important caveat.[129] As Carson (2010:39) rightly explains:

> the fact of our differences is easier to absorb against the background of our common heritage; all of us have been made in the image of God, who alone enjoys perfect and exhaustive knowledge. To suppose that we can attain knowledge in every way just like his would be idolatrous, but that is no reason to think that we cannot gain objective knowledge at all.

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[127] Recalling, for example, Pinnock’s (2013) eventual compromise concerning the doctrine of God’s absolute nature, by adherence to open theism.

[128] It has, however, been argued that epistemology is not really “central” to postmodern theology (Leithart, 2008:10). Now, this argument is largely unconvincing, simply by noting the fact that postmodernism is a philosophy, and epistemology is fundamental to any philosophy. And the denial of an objective reading of the biblical text is a decidedly epistemological claim, a claim furthermore recognised as a defining mark of postmodern theology. To say epistemology is not really central to postmodern theology seems more an attempt to sweep the obvious epistemological weaknesses of postmodernism under the rug. Leithart (2008:11) prefers “eschatology” as “central” to postmodernism. Oddly, Leithart (2008:182) concludes by way of Solomon (his biblical case study in support of postmodernism); explaining that Solomon “directs attention specifically to the eschatological dimension of biblical faith, and here he radically parts company with postmodernity”. One gets the impression that Leithart (cf. 2008:99) is trying to superimpose the biblical emphasis of eschatology onto postmodernism, despite the fact that postmodernism more naturally declares eschatological nihilism – in effect, really no eschatology at all. Which prompts some questions: What really is central to what? Is eschatology natively central to postmodernism, or is it natively central to Scripture? The latter seems more likely.

[129] Carson (2010:38) aptly parallels this postmodern theological understanding, evident in the “new hermeneutic”, with deconstructionism, calling it “hermeneutical nihilism”. However, Carson (2010:39) recognises the value in cautioning against brash hermeneutics: “it is necessary to think our way back into [the] cultures [of the text]”. See also chapter three under *Hermeneutics*.

Carson's (2010:39) suggested approach to Scripture sensibly draws from the above possibility: "Doubtless, a reader may be largely controlled by personal biases … But it is possible that the reader will read and reread the text, learn something of the language and culture of the authors … and gradually 'fuse' his or her horizon of understanding with that of the text". In other words, there is no reason to think that such a "fusion" cannot result in objective knowledge – there is room for *learning* with respect to the *source of the text* (i.e., what the author intended to communicate).[130] More to the point: objectivity is not *a priori* impossible just because subjectivity exists in evaluation. By implication, an objective description of Christian faith both exists and is accessible by means of Scripture.

Lastly, even the more appraised emphasis of postmodern theology, namely, the Christian community, is objectively described in Scripture.[131] Such a description is to be expected, if the description of Christian faith is inexorably linked to the unity of believers. It is so because the entailment of humanity's reconciliation to God is the reconciliation of humanity one to another (John 17:21-22; Eph 4:1-6). Scripture describes the unity of Christians with respect to God as absolute, and so relays an objective message that is the substance of the "call" which originates from God: "one body … one Spirit … one hope … one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all". The message amounts to a hope that is transcendent because its conclusion promises the believer's participation with Jesus in his resurrected glory. Furthermore, as Gilmer (2010:324) prescribes: "We need to add to our metanarrative this fact: Not only is Christ coming again, but he is coming for a multiethnic, multi-cultural, multinational, multilingual body of Christ. We are the only ones…no, [*sic*] Jesus is the only one who can really make unity in diversity work". Although, it is not a matter of adding, rather emphasising the latter, which is already the declaration of Scripture (Rev 7:9-10). Nevertheless, the point to be emphasised: The relative only coheres with respect to the absolute. Zacharias (2010a:38) is right to describe this kind of unity in terms of *worship*. Diversity in unity outwardly focussed in worship, this is Revelation's (7:9-10; 19:6) enduring picture, once history has run its course.

[130] Similarly, McDowell and McDowell (2017:115) agree on the possibility of objectivity in the determination of the correct reading among textual variants, relaying four principled guidelines scholars follow in evaluating a text. "Clearly, a certain level of subjectivity exists in each of these four guidelines. A certain amount of intuition, common sense, and skill must then play into the scholar's final judgment" (McDowell & McDowell, 2017:115).

[131] The emphasis on community as opposed to the individual in postmodernism in general is appreciable, since community is indeed a biblical emphasis, although never with the diminishment of the individual's value (cf. Zacharias, 2010:38).

4.3.4 The Holy Spirit after inspiration

According to Scripture, upon believing "the word of truth, the gospel", the believer is "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit", Who is as such the "guarantee" of all that is promised (Eph 1:13-14; cf. 2 Cor 1:21-22). Lange *et al.* (2008g:24), commenting on *ἀρραβών* (guarantee) in 2 Corinthians 1:22, noting its monetary sense (i.e. a deposit), note also the outstanding phrase that is verse 22: "The whole phrase is a brachylogy [a concise expression] in which the act and its result are taken together; for it is implied that the Spirit is in such a way given that he abides in the heart". Lange *et al.* (2008g:24) explain, furthermore, that verse 22 "is added epexegetically", that "in this communication of the Spirit lies the true power of the sealing". Therefore, *ἀρραβών* (guarantee) corresponds directly to *σφραγίζω* (seal); the "seal" simultaneously an inward "deposit" (cf. Lange *et al.,* 2008g:24). Importantly, since the seal of the Spirit involves the Spirit's *abiding* in the believer, the seal cannot be conceived as impersonal, nor inert. Scripture implies that to be sealed by the Spirit is the beginning of a dynamic interchange (John 16:13; 2 Tim 2:7), a covenant relationship (Rom 8:15-16), and therefore an ontological overlap (John 17:23; 1 Cor 6:17); in every sense descriptive of the Spirit's *active witness* upon abiding in the believer. Furthermore, moving towards the specific topic at hand, there is a sense in which the abiding Spirit entails the believer's abiding by Scripture; e.g., "This is the covenant I will make with them during those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds" (Heb 10:16; cf. Jer 31:33).[132] In other words, the Spirit, by virtue of the covenant, abides *in* the believer, and there witnesses both to the sonship of the believer (Rom 8:16), and to the truth of Scripture, every bit the authoritative Word of God, *impressed* as such (cf. Sproul, 2014).[133] The latter witness to the nature of Scripture is described in terms of the "internal testimony", or "illumination"[134] of the Spirit. Helm (1992:312) defines this witness with the necessary qualifications as comprehensively as a sentence affords:

[132] See also the exegetical expansion in chapter three (section four) of Jesus' call to abide in his word/commandments (John 14:21, 23), demonstrably understood by Jesus with respect to the entire corpus of Scripture thereupon unified (cf. Matt 22:40). Abiding in Jesus' word/commandments is described as the proof of one's love for Jesus, with the appended promise of his abiding in the one who does so (John 14:23-24).

[133] Smith (2019:95) emphasises the distinction between the "internal *testimony*" and the "internal *witness*"; the latter relating to Romans 8:16. Rightly, what is involved is the Spirit's witness to two different things, but the parallel remains since both relate the Spirit's function of internal attestation towards confirmation. Moreover, on the basis of the synonymity between the words "testimony" and "witness", it is difficult to enforce distinction by means of them.

[134] Some (Voorwinde, 2012:50) distinguish between illumination and the internal testimony. Others (Frame, 2012; Smith, 2019:95) seem to use the terms interchangeably; Vickers (2011:50-51) examples the interchangeability in Warfield. Voorwinde (2012:50) does accept the close relation, qualifying: "The internal testimony of the Spirit is really the presupposition of the illumination of the Spirit". Regardless, the term "illumination" is a helpful descriptor for what results from the internal testimony of the Spirit.

> The internal testimony of the Spirit is not to be thought of as in some way short-circuiting the objective evidence or making up for the deficiencies in external scriptural evidence, nor as providing *additional* evidence, nor as merely acting as a mechanical stimulus, but as making the mind capable of the proper appreciation of the evidence, seeing it for what it is, and in particular heightening the mind's awareness of the marks of divinity present in the text in such a way as to produce the conviction that this text is indeed the product of the divine mind and therefore to be relied on utterly.[135]

Now, it is important to draw out the distinction between divine *inspiration* and the internal testimony of the Spirit (divine *illumination*).[136] Scripture stands as a physical (cohesive) manifestation of divine revelation in the world, and given its manifestation as such, and the evident providences involved in this manifestation,[137] it is more sensible that the latter should pertain to one thing (inspiration) and its application pertain to another thing (internal testimony/illumination). Furthermore, the particular historical process that distinguishes inspiration (a divinely determined period of time during which divinely determined human authors would manifest a divinely determined corpus of literature) communicates clearly that the manifestation of Scripture is by *divine initiative*. Conversely, illumination can be said to involve *human initiative*; indiscriminate believers assuming the humble position of inquiry and study by means of the Spirit (cf. Ps 51:6; Rom 12:2; 2 Tim 2:15; Jas 1:5). The role of the Spirit in effectuating the *transformative/sanctifying* establishment of Scripture in the mind and heart is still primary, but believers must position themselves to receive Scripture (and thereby the internal testimony of the Spirit) to that end.[138] For example, the command to "*be* transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2, emphasis added) conveys the sense both of the need for the believer's initiative and yet their passivity in the

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[135] Article seventeen of the Statement (ICBI) (1978:5) relates concisely: "We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word. We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture".

[136] Frame (2012) has penned an excellent synopsis of the neo-orthodox (and, broadly, evangelical) confusion of divine illumination with divine inspiration. Frame argues by the witness of Scripture for needed distinction between the two, exemplified in the orthodox understanding as per Calvin and Luther. Furthermore, Frame (2012) highlights a considerable logical problem that arises from the neo-orthodox fusing of inspiration and illumination: "in the Barthian tradition, not only is the witness of the Spirit essential to our acceptance of biblical authority; it is the one factor that *makes* Scripture authoritative … On this view, Scripture lacks authority before we believe it. But why should we believe a book that, before we believe it, has no authority over us?" Here is another parallel to postmodernist epistemology.

[137] As Vickers (2011:50) summarises: "the unity, consistency, and harmony of [the Scripture's] content, notwithstanding the fact that they were written by many human authors over many centuries of time; the loftiness of their language; their honesty in disclosing both the sins and integrity of their subjects; the fulfilment of the prophecies they contain; the organic unity of both the Old and the New Testaments".

[138] Frame (2012) explains this nuance in terms of subjectivity and objectivity: "Scripture has objective authority over us by virtue of its inspiration. We are responsible to obey it whether or not the Spirit has witnessed to us … The subjective authority of Scripture, however, comes through the Spirit's witness; we cannot obey from the heart until/unless the Spirit testifies *in* our heart".

effect. The same sense is found in the act of meditating on Scripture, which could be described as the intentional *internalising* of Scripture, thereby *receiving* transformation in mind and heart. The latter sense and intentionality are conveyed again in the psalmist's declaration: "With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Ps 119:10-11; cf. Ps 119:15, 97). This is what is to be modelled. As Carson puts it: "the aim of thoughtful Christians … is not so much to become masters of Scripture, but to be mastered by it, both for God's glory and his people's good (Carson, 2010:40).

If, as it seems, Scripture is intended to be applied in the process of sanctification (John 17:17),[139] then it should inform one's understanding of divine "accommodation" in inspiration; that while accommodation effectuates understanding, it is purposed for more. On this matter, the Old Testament tabernacle and temple furnish good illustration. Clearly, the tabernacle and temple and their corresponding narratives stand as instances of divine accommodation, since "the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands" (Acts 7:48). Yet, one cannot discern compromise from these narratives; to the contrary, there is a call to meticulous attention to detail (Exod 25:9) (the fulfilment of such detail enabled by the Spirit, no less [Exod 31:3-6]) and holiness (1 Chr 28:3). It follows from the tabernacle and temple that the purpose for which God accommodates to the human situation is not for a relationship of compromise, but for a relationship that redeems and sanctifies; that definitively sets apart a people as God's own – a high vantage from which to bless all nations, to be sure. By extension, in the gospel, Jesus' condescension involved emptying Himself of glory, not that He may dwell so emptied among humanity forever, but in order to raise humanity up in ever increasing glory with Him (John 17:22-24; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21; cf. Phil 2:1-11). If Jesus witnesses to the sanctifying function of Scripture; to the purpose of abiding in it as the production of his fruit (John 15:7), then the accommodation of Scripture, to human language and culture, is not an accommodation *dictated* by the need for compromise, but rather an accommodation that *cannot but* result in the transformation of humanity (Isa 55:11). Indeed,

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139 As Jesus prays: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth". It is said that this does not reference the written word (Michaels, 2010:1108). However, no overt prohibition is found against the extension of this statement to Scripture. Firstly, Scripture is described both as the Word of God, entirely true, and "unbreakable" (John 10:35), thereby embodying that which John 17:17 says achieves sanctification. Furthermore, Grudem (1992:27) has done well in showing that there is no indication of distinction between the authority and "truth status" of the spoken word of God and the written word, only that the "form of communication differs". Secondly, granting "word" in John 17:17 references the gospel message (Jamieson *et al.* [1997:160] parallel the verse with John 15:3, Colossians 1:5, and Ephesians 1:13), then the means by which it is accessed and apprehended *is* Scripture and the testimony of the Spirit therein. The latter point is informed by Frame (2012): "the Spirit can witness to those objective events [the crucifixion and resurrection] for us today only by witnessing to the apostolic *word* concerning those events, the word we have in Scripture" (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13).

Scripture is not in some way bound to the condition of humanity, but purposed for the freedom of humanity (John 8:31-32).

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we began by asking the two-part question: What is the nature of contemporary context and how does biblical inerrancy apply? In answering this more general question, first, the reality of postmodernism (difficult to define as it is) and its attendant ideologies were expanded in appropriate historical and theoretical context, and highlighted as globally prevalent (especially in such recent manifestations as "post-truth era") and dangerous. The danger is found, chiefly, in the trend towards the recantation of objective truth (so too, the metanarrative and the absolute) and its accessibility, favouring instead subjective, autonomous, preference as the determinant of beliefs – modernism here found relating to some extent. Furthermore, a tangible difficulty is experienced (politically, also) with pluralism (ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, etc.) as an increasingly global reality, due to globalisation. The theological difficulty is seen to arise when pluralism becomes ideological, advanced by the implementation of a tolerance informed more by postmodernist notions than the original liberal conception, such that objective distinctions and considerations of the absolute become of no consequence in the public eye. Evidently, Christians all over the world, exposed to these postmodern tides, are pressured to capitulate and in some way deny the objectivity of the Christian faith, overtly or subliminally. All the while, the thirst for objective truth to satiate the universal questions of origin and identity; for the absolute; for some metanarrative to make sense of the human situation, is very much a reality, and one that postmodernism evidently cannot address. As to the application of inerrancy, it was determined as derivative with respect to its implications; thereby negatively applied against postmodernism with affirmations to the contrary of postmodernism, but positively applied to universal human inquiries of origin and identity, affirming their legitimacy and answerability – both with respect to the propositions of Scripture. Furthermore, inerrancy is seen to facilitate an affirmation of the objectivity of the Christian faith, since it implies the objective truthfulness of Scripture's propositions, which in turn teach the objectivity of Christian faith. The Holy Spirit, in turn, is seen to function uniquely, confirming through a divine-human relational transaction both the Christian faith and Scripture as objectively true. This is said to involve the Spirit's witnessing on the subjective level towards a personal conviction of the truth of the gospel and Scripture. Here the function of Scripture is seen in terms of sanctification.

Coming then to the primary research question: To what extent can the evidences for biblical inerrancy prevent doctrinal compromise among believers in a contemporary culture of pluralism?

While it is clear the question cannot be answered in any statistical sense, there are few factors gleaned from what is discussed above that imply a limit to the singular ability of inerrancy to prevent doctrinal compromise. The element of free will, for one, can limit the efficacy of any doctrine, however well evidenced and defended. This is because the implementation of every doctrine depends largely on the willing assent of individuals. And related to the dynamic of free will is the illumination of the Spirit, which was shown to involve human initiative, thereby leading to greater conviction of the truthfulness and authority of Scripture. Of course, if believers infrequently position themselves in Scripture and infrequently inquire of the Spirit when doing so, there is less opportunity for heart and mind transformation towards such conviction. Furthermore, it is clear from Scripture that the key to abiding by Scripture is to love God, and vice versa; it is not simply about the restatement of a doctrine for which there is great evidence. Nevertheless, it must be restated, as has been shown, that inerrancy is certainly defensible, by many scriptural and historical evidences, and immensely important because it both informs of the nature of Scripture (and, thereby, God!) and provides a “theological safeguard” (cf. Craig, 2015). Undoubtedly, such a safeguard is needed given the contemporary context. The evidences for inerrancy can give believers assurance that Scripture provides a suitable bedrock against the tides of postmodernism; that their faith is objectively true, knowable, and distinguishable as such amidst increasing plurality, yet permitting healthy plurality without any insecurity. Since inerrancy, properly defined, functions as such a safeguard, it can and does afford the prevention of doctrinal compromise, within reasonable limits.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Motivations, questions and findings: a summary

The central objective of this study has been a defence of orthodox (unlimited) biblical inerrancy, and its application in the contemporary context, such that objective faith is affirmed. In particular, showing that inerrancy can be invoked by believers (Christians), affording resolution in said objective faith. This was motivated primarily by three things. 1) Waning adherence to the doctrine of inerrancy (unlimited in particular), and the authority of Scripture in general, on account of the influence of neo-orthodox and liberal theological traditions, and secular New Testament scholarship. 2) The postmodernist tides in contemporary context that advance the dismissal of objective truth and, by implication, objective faith. 3) The conviction that Scripture, as the Word of God, is an inerrant, providentially preserved corpus of literature; furthermore, that it, as the Word of God, holds an objectively true communication of the purpose of humanity with respect to divine intention, so too informing objective faith. What follows is a summary of the research questions and findings presented throughout this study towards the substantiation of the central objective and the justification of the respective motivations.

5.1.1 The need for preliminary questions

It was necessary to begin a defence of inerrancy on ontological grounds, since the debate, at bottom, has to do with the nature of Scripture. It is immediately apparent that Scripture, as a corpus of literature, written by several human authors in different periods, cultures, and languages, is very human. The contention, however, lies in Scripture's testimony to its divine nature – granting its divine nature, what that means for the nature of Scripture. Therefore, chapter two was centred on establishing theism (as per Warfield and Hodge [2015:8]) and as such, on the nature of God and humanity with respect to God. For, if we are to consider the Bible a human *and* divine book, we had better understand what divine and human nature entails. Hence chapter two's preliminary ontological questions: "Who is God?" and "Who is humankind?" The answers to these questions, derived from biblical descriptions, in turn informed the answer to the primary question in the chapter: "What are the implications of divine ontology and human ontology as they are biblically defined?" And profound implications do follow from the biblical descriptions of divine and human nature. The primary finding with respect to God, is that He is *necessarily* infinite; that Scripture presupposes God before anything, thereby communicating that He is without contingence, and therefore necessarily infinite. This was defended by way of a presuppositional deductive argument informed by the ontological and cosmological arguments, respectively – positioned variously against deistic, naturalistic and open theistic notions. It was also noted that God's infinitude means that it is *logically impossible* for Him to err. Furthermore, maintaining the infinitude of God in concert with the biblical disclosure of his attributes indicated a complex omni-essence, such that God is more appropriately described in terms of infinite *personhood* than infinite *force*. Coming to the biblical conception of humanity; humanity as the *imago Dei* was seen to communicate God's personal investment in humanity. And humanity derived from God in that unique and notably complex way was seen to merit divine revelation, which Scripture and Jesus most comprehensively and climactically embody.

5.1.2 The need for definition

With the ontological foundations laid, chapter three began the substantive defence of inerrancy as true to the nature of Scripture. But since inerrancy is understood as a theoretically and historically complex doctrine – as the in-house debate testifies to – its precise definition was necessary to orient exactly what was to be defended. Hence the importance of the first part of chapter three's two-part question: "What is the nature of … biblical inerrancy?" It was determined that inerrancy is only correctly defined with respect to related doctrines such as divine inspiration (chiefly) and infallibility, determining the appropriate extent of the authority of Scripture. The identified convolution in these matters, leading either to the expression of inerrancy as limited or unlimited, justified more so the need for the careful qualification of related terms. Furthermore, historical stances on the nature of Scripture proved helpful in demonstrating notable consensus on the nature of inerrancy as *unlimited* (or propositional), such that defining inerrancy as unlimited is really to adopt the orthodox understanding. With the determination that inerrancy is most appropriately defined as unlimited, this study could maintain the necessary distinctions in mounting a defence of unlimited inerrancy; liberal and neo-orthodox conceptions of Scripture were therefore expanded and confirmed as the (nuanced) opposition to this defence, with more extreme opposition coming from outside Christian circles in the form of secular New Testament scholarship.

5.1.3 Defending inerrancy: the primacy of deduction

After identifying the nature of inerrancy to be defended, and the nature of the opposition, an appropriate defence could be set forward. This, the third (main) section of chapter three, was therefore set to address the second part of the two-part question: "What is the … evidence for biblical inerrancy?" In the endeavour to answer the question there was a departure from Warfield and Hodge (2015:8) who advocate continuing with an inductive/historical defence of inspiration (from which inerrancy proceeds) before considering the "divine origin of Christianity". The reason for the departure hinged on the explanatory power afforded by modifying the basic deductive argument for inerrancy with respect to chapter two's deductive argument for God's existence. The emphasis of both arguments is the infinitude of God: in chapter two the implication of the logical impossibility of God's erring was first presented; in chapter three this implication was applied to Scripture, which as inspired by Him is therefore unable to err. Now, the latter was set in the context of several deductive arguments. The deductive argument derived from Jesus' affirmations of Scripture's entire truthfulness and authority (which were also exegetically substantiated), greatly complimentary to the basic argument as it is, simply could not be omitted. And the various deductive arguments attempting to prove the errancy of Scripture by means of human nature, being one of the main objections from the opposition, needed serious consideration. Here it was important to reflect on the nature of humanity as *imago*, which negates the notion of error being necessary to human nature. Drawing from the understanding of divine inspiration as divine *initiative* and explaining that the superiority of divine nature is maintained in inspiration, were useful in demonstrating that divine accommodation also need not involve error. Despite the primacy of these deductive arguments, attention was also given to inductive matters. This was important since it is mostly on inductive grounds that the opposition is seen to attack the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. In dialogue with some concerns from the opposition (e.g. Ehrman, and proponents of the Jesus Seminar), the historical reliability of Scripture was found to be *exemplary*, not only when considering the cogency of its content but also its unparalleled manuscript tradition (notable also were the volumes of unanalysed manuscripts, having untold potential for corroboration). When it came to considering specific difficulties in the text, only a sample few (drawn with respect to the opposition; e.g. Enns, Pinnock) could be considered, nevertheless, representing the spectrum of the types of difficulties in the text (theological; detail; narrative; extra-biblical). The emphasis towards resolution of such difficulties was placed on principled hermeneutics, as informed by the historical-grammatical method, whose primacy was also justified. The guiding sentiment in the approach to the respective difficulties was in line with Warfield and Hodge's (2015:36) concise statement: "It is not sufficient to show a difficulty, which may spring out of our defective knowledge of the circumstances". The respective difficulties were then expanded, and met with plausible solutions given the relevant historical and textual contexts. Discovering no overwhelming difficulty or argument that succeeds in subverting inerrancy, the study was justified in upholding inerrancy as defensible. Furthermore, in view of the strength of the deductive arguments for inerrancy as derived from Scripture, and the favourable historical data, the study was justified in esteeming inerrancy as a necessary part of an orthodox Scripture principle.

5.1.4 Challenge and opportunity in contemporary context

Having substantiated inerrancy as defensible and necessary to an orthodox Scripture principle, the focus of chapter four was determining the application of inerrancy in the contemporary context, specifically as it affords the believers' resolve in objective faith. Hence chapter four's two-part question: "What is the nature of contemporary context and how does biblical inerrancy apply?" Naturally, determining how inerrancy was to be applied involved first determining the context of application. In answering the first part of the question, then, postmodernism with attendant ideologies (historically and theoretically unpacked) were identified as having significant influence in contemporary (global) context, as evidenced in the related "post-truth" phenomenon, and spurred on by increasing pluralisation (itself a political difficulty) on account of globalisation. With these ideological trends identified and unpacked, they were determined as dangerous primarily due to the fact that they involve the dismissal of objective truth in favour of autonomous preference, amounting to ideological pluralism under the banner of "tolerance". This was postured as the theological difficulty, or challenge, in the contemporary context. Particularly concerning was confirming the influence of these ideologies on Christians in the contemporary context, such that an absolute (or objective faith) is not only seen to be diminished in the public eye, but also in the eyes of some Christians. On a more positive note, however, considerations on the contemporary context also confirmed a universal desire for objective answers to questions of origin and identity (a metanarrative) from which to derive meaning. This was in turn postured as something of an opportunity in contemporary context (indeed, any context) for the presentation and/or establishment of objective truth and faith.

5.1.5 Limitations in the application of inerrancy

With the first part of chapter four's two-part question answered, the second part "… how does biblical inerrancy apply?" could be appropriately answered. Answering this part of the question was therefore done with respect to the ideological realities of the contemporary context, and the noted universal inquiries present in the contemporary context. However, it was also necessary to maintain the understanding of inerrancy as a complex theological doctrine, as such permitting only a derivative application in the contemporary context. The result was this study's application of inerrancy in terms of its relevant implications, which in turn meant a negative application on the one hand (against postmodern ideological trends by implying objective truth), and a positive application on the other (meeting the universal inquiries with satisfactory answers). It was therefore determined that to apply biblical inerrancy is really to apply the relevant propositions of Scripture as objectively truthful. Therefore, the application took the form of a series of reaffirmations (of objective truth, humanity, and objective faith) by means of Scripture's propositions. The inquiry paradigm of Lamberigts *et al.* (2006:1) served to frame this approach. Beginning by reaffirming objective truth; the grounding of truth (theological and otherwise) was identified, in a manner unashamedly Augustinian, as determined with respect to theology proper (divine ontology), and theology proper in turn with respect to Scripture (relating divine self-disclosure). Furthermore, the importance of divine providence in the *accessibility* of objective truth was emphasised, ultimately furnishing a satisfactory answer to the question of origin in contrast to postmodernism. Likewise, reaffirming humanity with respect to Scripture meant doing so in view of the *imago*, bolstered by the reality of the human sense of objective value, implying that the question of human identity is also objectively answerable, in contrast to postmodernism. Reaffirming objective faith involved emphasising the historicity of the gospel as recorded in Scripture. It was understood that this historicity lends itself to objectivity, and that when maintaining the gospel events (crucifixion and resurrection) as historical, objective implications necessarily follow. Moreover, Scripture as the objective standard informing Christian faith was qualified against the notion of tradition fulfilling that role; that it is consequently proper for Christians to establish themselves with respect to Scripture. That the latter stance is needed was qualified in view of the prevalence of postmodern notions. And agreement was found with Strange's (2018:8) "subversive confrontation" against conflicting ideologies; recognising also that Scripture is what sufficiently informs Christians in doing so. The objection of postmodern theology to an objective knowledge of the text of Scripture was fielded by restating the viability of hermeneutics in achieving objective knowledge. Furthermore, examining the unique function of the Holy Spirit involved assessing his witness to the objective truthfulness of the Christian faith and Scripture, bringing subjective conviction of their objective truthfulness. Here Scripture's sanctifying function was noted, and that divine accommodation (of which Scripture is an example) is fittingly understood as purposed for sanctification, not compromise.

Arriving, then, at the primary research question: "To what extent can the evidences for biblical inerrancy prevent doctrinal compromise among believers in a contemporary culture of pluralism?" It was determined that the question could not be answered in any statistical sense, nevertheless, that an answer can be given in retrospect of the relevant findings: "1) reasonable application of inerrancy towards objective faith, and 2) sufficient evidence for biblical inerrancy". The "reasonability" in applying inerrancy was understood with respect to certain limiting factors: wilfully inquiry (by means of the Spirit in Scripture), and love for God. It was determined that without the latter two factors as the believer's reality, no doctrine however well defined and defended can ultimately prevent doctrinal compromise. However, it was also determined that given the significant evidences for inerrancy, inerrancy is defensible and can function as a "theological safeguard"

(Craig, 2015). This is because the evidences for inerrancy affirm Scripture as a bedrock; its propositions as a dependable reference against opposing culture. It was suggested that this affords objective faith in the face of and opposed to ideological pluralism, yet by the character of that faith, the inclusion of healthy plurality. Therefore, it was held that to the extent that such evidences furnish the understanding of Scripture as a bedrock, is the extent to which it can prevent doctrinal compromise.

5.2 Final remarks: considerations for the future

Doubtless, the debate on inerrancy, whether it is limited or unlimited, or whether the term is at all appropriate to a Scripture principle, will continue for the foreseeable future, at least. That said, it is hoped that this study has made a fair contribution to the ongoing debate, especially as it concerns believers in the contemporary context. Having assessed the trajectory of the contemporary context, this author maintains the conviction that the matter of objective truth and, in turn, objective faith, will be of increasing importance, and so too one's conception of the nature of Scripture. Strange's "subversive confrontation" is a commendable stance for the future, so long as it remains informed by Scripture. As for the future of the doctrine of inerrancy specifically, this author believes that the relevant deductive arguments, having very strong bases, will be an enduring part of defending the doctrine. Furthermore, this author believes that inductive research may introduce novelties that could liven interest in the debate around the nature of Scripture. If the history of inductive research (such as what is exampled in textual criticism) is anything to go by, these novelties will likely favour the reliability of Scripture. Perhaps among the many manuscripts that have yet to be analysed (and those yet to be discovered) there is a surviving first century fragment of the New Testament. And assuming its uniformity with the manuscript tradition, the reliability of Scripture would be *profoundly* substantiated. And such potential exists in the field of archaeology no less.

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