

THE FUTURE OF COGNITIVE REVERENCE FOR THE BIBLE

ROBERT W. YARBROUGH*

This conference marks the 65th year of the ETS.¹ Our theme is “Evangelicalism, Inerrancy, and the Evangelical Theological Society: Retrospect and Prospect.” It so happens that 2013 is also the 35th anniversary of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, the meeting out of which emerged the both vilified and venerated Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.² It is therefore natural if not inevitable that the presidential address given at this historic juncture reflect on future regard for the Bible.

I. REGARD FOR THE BIBLE PRESENT AND PAST

Present regard is too complex and dynamic to capture—witness the dozens of papers devoted to the topic over this three-day conference. A sense for how Scripture is regarded in some of our circles and elsewhere will emerge in this paper, but that will not be my primary focus.

Past regard for the Bible in this society is a matter of history, though like all history it can be interpreted in various ways. From our founding this society has affirmed, “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs.”³ That statement was never a claim that only this view can sustain a redemptive knowledge of God or adequate representation of the saving gospel message. It was simply an affirmation thought to be grounded in Scripture, in the doctrines of God and of inspiration, in the history of the church, and in scholarship that all of the Bible, rightly interpreted, is true in all things it intends to affirm. This was above all an approach rooted in reverence for writings regarded as holy because of their ultimate origin from and disclosure of God.

In the era of the founding of this society, the mid-twentieth century, mainline Protestant religion in North America and Europe along with associated post-colonial regions had largely jettisoned the church’s historic view of Scripture. It

* Robert W. Yarbrough, professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, 12330 Conway Road, St. Louis, MO 63141, delivered this presidential address at the 65th annual meeting of the ETS on November 20, 2013, in Baltimore, MD.

¹ For their input on this essay I would like to thank Dan Doriani, Radu Gheorgita, Sydney Park, Robert Peterson, and Kevin Vanhoozer. Of course they bear no blame for its shortcomings.

² On which discussion has been substantially updated by Jason Sexton, “How Far Beyond Chicago? Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate,” *Them* 34 (2009) 26–49.

³ This half of the “Doctrinal Basis” of the ETS can be found inside the front cover of any recent *JETS*. The other half is: “God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.”

may have been reactionary, but it was not unjustified, that ETS founding members sought to create a learned society for mutual encouragement and support. Their aim was to investigate, uphold, and commend the truth of the Bible that had been abandoned or at the very least substantially distorted in leading centers of religion and intellectual inquiry in Europe for generations, gradually nudging North American institutions in the same post-Christian directions.

II. THE DISPUTED FUTURE OF “HOLY” SCRIPTURE

Yet it is not this history or the past per se but future regard for Scripture that I wish to reflect on here. We live in the wake of a series of developments in the West that have resulted in cognitive irreverence for the Bible. A. E. Harvey in his recent book *Is Scripture Still Holy? Coming of Age with the New Testament* observes, “Indeed, the world ‘holy’ itself has been losing currency and now seldom appears in the same breath as ‘Bible’ or ‘Scripture.’”⁴ Harvey helps to show why. He pits revelation as “the person of Jesus Christ” against the words of the NT. The NT’s words lack “the sanctity of direct utterances from God, since they are a human record of the revelation, not the revelation itself.”⁵ “It is not necessary to believe,” he writes, “that the creation of this record required divine intervention,” nor are the words of the Bible “the record of any speech-act of God.”⁶ “There is little theological justification,” he continues, for saying “This is the Word of the Lord” when Scripture is read in liturgy.⁷

Accordingly, Harvey caricatures and rejects the doctrine of inspiration, concluding triumphantly, “a concept of ‘holiness’ which implies literal inerrancy is one which is both theologically and philosophically indefensible and is rightly rejected by the majority voice of a generation which has, in this respect, genuinely ‘come of age.’”⁸ Harvey intentionally uses Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s expression, though he has the integrity to note that “Bonhoeffer was surprisingly conservative in his approach to Scripture,” which Harvey blames on two things: Barth’s influence on Bonhoeffer, and Bonhoeffer’s failure to recognize that “humankind might have ‘come of age,’ not just in its approach to God but in its response to the very notion of inspired and authoritative texts.”⁹

In the NT, the Jesus whom Harvey says is God’s revelation reveres God’s written word. Christ approached Scripture with reverence. Harvey—not so much. This is not surprising, because irreverence has epitomized traditional Enlightenment regard for Scripture from the beginning of Enlightenment hermeneutics. Whether we think of Kant’s essay “What is Enlightenment?,” Voltaire’s mockeries of things holy, Lessing’s complaints against so-called bibliolatry and his dismissal of

⁴ A. E. Harvey, *Is Scripture Still Holy? Coming of Age with the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 2.

⁵ *Ibid.* 5–6.

⁶ *Ibid.* 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.* 9.

⁹ *Ibid.* 1.

history as a valid avenue of acquiring knowledge, or the Enlightenment era's Humean rejection of the miraculous as myth and superstition, the notion of a God who addresses the human race in words like these was opposed: "These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word" (Isa 66:2 NIV2011). Enlightenment scholars like Semler had already asserted that God's word and Scripture were not necessarily the same thing anyway.¹⁰ Rather, Scripture in places at best *contains* God's word; readers like Harvey who have come of age possess the ability to pick out of Scripture the truths that the hegemonic "we" confirms may be scattered in it. Banned is the mentality of Prov 30:5: "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him."

Thus Ulrich Wilckens, Professor of NT Emeritus at the University of Hamburg in Germany, recently published a book called *Kritik der Bibelkritik (Criticism of Biblical Criticism)*.¹¹ The subtitle is *How the Bible Can Become Holy Scripture Again*. Due to less than reverent handling, in many quarters Scripture ceased being regarded as holy long ago.

III. A COUNTERPROPOSAL

Despite Scripture's frequently beleaguered status for generations now in the West where in many quarters Christian faith (as measured, e.g., in weekly church attendance) is not surprisingly dying, I believe the future is bright for approaches that accord cognitive reverence to the Bible. By that I mean we do not put the spirit of our age and certain self-exalting, elitist subcultures in the hermeneutical driver's seat for interpreting Scripture but approach it with a hermeneutic of discerning and self-critical but reverential consent. Michael Legaspi has given a valuable account of how *not* to approach Scripture in his book *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, a book focusing on Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791).¹² Unfortunately, the approach Legaspi chronicles and questions became dominant in academic interpretation with grave implications for both church and world, a major point of his book. Another point Legaspi makes is that we should rethink the academy's self-appointed role of gatekeeper of the meaning of Scripture.¹³

A better approach to the Bible is one in which we recognize it as God's word, able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:15), and

¹⁰ See, e.g., W. G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) 62–69.

¹¹ Ulrich Wilckens, *Kritik der Bibelkritik: Wie die Bibel wieder zur Heiligen Schrift werden kann* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2012).

¹² Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹³ Typified, for example, by Christopher B. Ansberry and Christopher M. Hays, who cast academicians like themselves as "theologians who are (we pray) rudders in the hands of a divine helmsman who guides us [i.e., the church] between the devil and the deep-blue sea." The church should take its cue from scholars whose conclusions are determinative for what the Bible says, which unfortunately is not all true, which is presumably why these scholars' guidance is so critical. See Hays and Ansberry, eds., *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* (London: SPCK, 2013) 205.

true in all it affirms, rightly interpreted. I call this “cognitive reverence” in that it privileges Scripture over human reason, experience, and tradition, without in any way denying that reason, experience, and tradition are necessary and welcome factors in how we go about understanding Scripture.

With regard to reason, for example, David Crump’s book *Encountering Jesus, Encountering Scripture: Reading the Bible Critically in Faith* makes a strong case for reason in interpretation, but with the recognition that “reason is avidly imperialistic, attempting to plant its victory flag over every dimension of thought whether it belongs there or not.”¹⁴ Because reason is sinful, finite, and socially conditioned, Crump writes, drawing on the Bible and Luther and Kierkegaard, reason can be “blind to its own crippling prejudice.”¹⁵ We need to respect and deploy reason, but we need to revere Scripture.

As we do, I am bullish on cognitive reverence for the Bible, even to the point of the inerrancy that the Harvey hegemony finds reprehensible (and that Hays and Ansberry et al. subtly but clearly repudiate¹⁶). I am glad I studied, back in the early 1980s, a raw blue-collar tradesman, under someone like Merrill C. Tenney at Wheaton College Graduate School. Tenney was one of the founders of this society and its president 62 years ago, in 1951, two years before I was even born. Rigorous scholarship informed his many books, a number of them still in print, yet it was a reverent scholarship, too. I would like to commend such a reverent approach to the Bible, which I believe will tend to result in the affirmation of Scripture’s inerrancy, to present and future members of this society.

Here are three major reasons why.

IV. COGENCY AND VITALITY

Excellent recent books demonstrate the cogency and vitality of a reverent and indeed an inerrantist stance. Two such books were made available to me in pre-publication form for this address.

1. *Craig Blomberg, Can We Still Believe the Bible?* The first is by Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible? An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions*.¹⁷ Blomberg takes up six issues that he finds foundational to an affirmation of the Bible’s comprehensive credibility like that affirmed by this society.¹⁸ In each of these categories, Blomberg cites the literature of those who reject a high view of the Bible’s veracity or authenticity. As he points out, those critical of the

¹⁴ David Crump, *Encountering Jesus, Encountering Scripture: Reading the Bible Critically in Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013) 119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 120.

¹⁶ Hays and Ansberry, eds., *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism*, *passim*.

¹⁷ Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible? An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2014).

¹⁸ I.e. (1) the alleged corruption of the Bible’s texts; (2) the canon question; (3) the challenge of so many translations; (4) the alleged implausibility of scriptural inerrancy; (5) difficulties in certain biblical narrative genres, like the creation narratives and the books of Job and Jonah; and (6) the purportedly mythical nature of the Bible’s miracles.

Bible's truth often do not return the favor, stonewalling evangelical arguments and publications as if that class of scholarship did not even exist. Blomberg calls attention to the best studies he can find that reject his viewpoint. He then argues for the position from his inerrantist standpoint. He notes, "Not a single supposed contradiction" in Scripture "has gone without someone proposing a reasonably plausible resolution."¹⁹ He also notes the irony that some are abandoning inerrancy today when "inerrantists have the ability to define and nuance their understanding of the doctrine better than ever before."²⁰

This book is refreshing and important not only because of its breadth of coverage of issues, viewpoints, and literature. It is evenhanded in that both enemies of inerrancy and wrong-headed friends are called on the carpet. Blomberg revisits incidents like Robert Gundry's dismissal from this society and the kerfluffle over a decade ago surrounding the TNIV and inclusive language. He does not mince words in criticizing those he sees as overzealous for the inerrancy cause. Nor is he bashful in calling out former inerrantists who, Blomberg finds, often make their polemical arguments against what they used to believe with less than compelling warrant. I predict that everyone who reads the book will disagree strongly with the author about something.

At the same time, the positive arguments for inerrancy are even more substantial. It is clear that Blomberg is not content with poking holes in non-inerrantist arguments. He writes, "I do not think one has to settle for anything short of full-fledged inerrantist Christianity so long as we ensure that we employ all parts of a detailed exposition of inerrancy, such as that found in the Chicago Statement."²¹ Or again: "These Scriptures are trustworthy. We can still believe the Bible. We *should* still believe the Bible and act accordingly, by following Jesus in discipleship."²² I am skimming some of his concluding statements, but the real meat of the book is inductive demonstration of inerrancy's plausibility based on primary evidence and scholarship surrounding that evidence. If only a book of this substance had been available when I was a college or grad school student!

2. *James Merrick and Stephen Garrett, eds., Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy.* Another book due out soon is edited by James Merrick and Stephen Garrett. It appears in the Zondervan Counterpoints Series and is called *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*.²³ The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 is Perspectives on Inerrancy and the Past. R. Albert Mohler Jr. opens things with his essay "When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy." This is followed by a true counterpoint, as Peter Enns's chapter is called "Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does." Inerrancy's pros and cons could hardly be presented in starker light.

¹⁹ Ibid. 2.

²⁰ Ibid. 10.

²¹ Ibid. 222.

²² Ibid. 225.

²³ James Merrick and Stephen Garrett, eds., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

Part 2 is called Inerrancy in International Perspective and consists of a single essay by Michael Bird, Lecturer in Theology at Ridley Melbourne Mission and Ministry College in Australia.²⁴ He writes a piece called “Inerrancy Is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism Outside the USA.” Then in Part 3 the book features largely offsetting essays by Kevin Vanhoozer and John Franke. Vanhoozer writes “Augustinian Inerrancy: Literary Meaning, Literal Truth, and Literate Interpretation in the Economy of Biblical Discourse.” Franke’s chapter is called “Recasting Inerrancy: The Bible as Witness to Missional Plurality.”

Why might this book contribute to optimism about the future of cognitive reverence for the Bible? I will limit myself to just two reasons. First, it demonstrates that inerrancy is and will continue to be a live topic. This is not only because five senior scholars address it substantially with two definitely in favor and a third, Michael Bird, very close;²⁵ it is also because the editors, both markedly younger, indicate by their essays at the beginning and end of the book that they see the continuing importance of inerrancy for the coming generation of our academic and church leaders. Merrick writes, “We believe this [book] will generate new conversations about inerrancy that consider previous questions as well as new ones, enriching the lives and faith of evangelicals. Furthermore, we will call attention to those matters that are insufficiently developed and thus require more attention in future conversations.”²⁶ Cognitive reverence for Scripture has a bright future in the practice and theory of our circles in coming years.

Second, the book shows the viability of inerrancy. Granted Enns attacks the doctrine, and Franke substantially recasts it. But in playing their cards of dissent they show just how strong a hand they hold, and many may find these hands surprisingly shaky, as do Mohler, Vanhoozer, and Bird in their responses. On the positive side, all five scholars, following the protocol given them by the editors, comment helpfully on the Chicago Statement and give their reasons for affirming inerrancy, or not, along with how they define and understand it. This is an exercise fertile in result for the attentive reader, as all five scholars also offer their candid assessments of each other’s positions.

V. FRUITFULNESS FOR RESEARCH AND GROWTH OF KNOWLEDGE

Other exemplary volumes could be mentioned, like the Broadman & Holman publication *In Defense of the Bible*, edited by Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder,²⁷ which is not just a defense. But I must move on to a second reason why I am optimistic about cognitive reverence for the Bible as reflected in many inerrantist po-

²⁴ Bird is also Honorary Research Consultant at the University of Queensland.

²⁵ Bird opts for “a commitment to the *infallibility* and *authority* of Scripture, but not necessarily a doctrine of Scripture conceived in the specific terms of the American inerrancy tradition as represented in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.” Michael F. Bird, “Inerrancy Is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism Outside the USA,” in Merrick and Garrett, *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* 146.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 25.

²⁷ Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, eds., *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Nashville: B&H, 2013).

sitions: the result of this stance is often fruitful for biblical research and enhanced understanding. Blomberg is an example, as he notes, “The reliability of Scripture is the topic that first catapulted me into biblical scholarship.”²⁸

He is not alone in this. A large percentage of ETS members could probably say something similar. Concern for the truth motivates many to endure the loneliness of the long-distance Bible or theology student, paying the price necessary to acquire the several competencies and skills necessary to follow and perhaps eventually participate in technical exegetical and theological discussions.

Here a look at Romania is instructive. In a recent essay on NT studies in Europe, the Romanian situation was inexplicably and lamentably ignored.²⁹ This is a good place to correct that essay’s failure. Under the dark years of communism determined believers found ways to learn their Bibles better and serve Christ in costly ways despite deprivation and sometimes persecution. I am told that during those grim years, Second Baptist Church of Oradea, an epicenter of security harassment, came to have the largest church attendance of any Protestant church in Europe. Although it seemed like the night of totalitarian rule would be endless, plans were made and prayers were offered for a day when untrammelled study of God’s word at a high academic level would be possible. Many if not most of the key figures in this planning were inerrantists.

That time came beginning in the early 1990s. In the years since then, a long list of Romanian believers has completed academic Ph.D.s. These sons and daughters of a martyr church are now active in witness around the world. An online posting from the Romanian journal *Perichoresis* lists 52 Romanian evangelicals with doctorates in biblical or theological studies, and that list is not complete.³⁰ When you consider that the population of Romania is not much over 20 million, and that the evangelical population pool can hardly be more than five percent, or just one million people, it can be asked whether there is a historical parallel for so many persons acquiring academic doctorates in this field in such a short time span.

Time does not suffice to list all of these scholars, their degrees, their scores of publications, and their current positions. But I will name a few, as they are living tribute to a reverence for Scripture sufficient to impel people despite harsh political, social, and financial disincentives to devote their lives to researching Scripture’s subject matter and then placing their learning at the disposal of church, academy, or sometimes both. Many of these figures affirm inerrancy; some are in this audience. Some are active scholars in Europe, like Paul Negrut, Ph.D. London Bible College; Emil Bartos, Ph.D. University of Wales, Lampeter; Marius Cruceru, Ph.D. University of Bucharest; Corneliu Simut, Ph.D. University of Aberdeen and a second

²⁸ Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* ix.

²⁹ Robert Yarbrough, “New Testament Studies in Europe,” in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of D. A. Carson on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (ed. Andreas Köstenberger and Robert Yarbrough; Wheaton: Crossway, 2011) 324–48.

³⁰ <http://perichoresis.ro/theologia/images/Teologi/romanian%20evangelicals%20with%20doctorates%20in%20theology.pdf>. See also Danut Manastireanu, “Romanian Evangelicals with Doctorates in Theology,” *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 15/1 (Winter 2007) 7–12.

Ph.D. University of Tilburg. One should also mention Dr. Otniel Bunaciu, Ph.D. Protestant Theological Institute, Cluj, Romania, who is the current president of Romania's Baptist Union and of the European Baptist Federation. There is also Beni Faragau, Ph.D. Queen's University, Belfast, who remains in faithful pastoral ministry in Cluj,³¹ and Danut Manastireanu, Ph.D. London School of Theology, Director for Faith & Development for the Middle East & Eastern Europe Region of World Vision International and Assistant Professor, Evangelical Theological Faculty, Osijek, Croatia.

Others are teaching outside of Romania: Radu Gheorghita, Ph.D. University of Cambridge, teaching at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; Tiberius Rata, Ph.D. Trinity International University, teaching at Grace Theological Seminary; George Ille, Ph.D. King's College London, adjunct at Asbury Seminary; Adonis Vidu, Ph.D. University of Nottingham, teaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; and George Hancock-Stefan, Ph.D. Trinity International University, teaching at Palmer Theological Seminary. Cristian Rata, Ph.D. University of Toronto, teaches OT at Torch Trinity Graduate University in Seoul, South Korea.

Dozens more names and degrees could be listed. My point is to draw a connection between the zeal for a true and authoritative Scripture that defined and sustained a persecuted church for decades and the fruit this has borne in research and teaching among members of that church. More men and women than I have listed are applying their degrees not in academia but in various vocational ministries whether church, parachurch, or other. And I have spoken only of Romania: this picture could be extended to dozens of countries around the world as women and men who think the whole Bible rightly interpreted is wholly true are seeking or have completed terminal degrees and are contributing to new publications and discovery of impressive proportions.

VI. HISTORIC OUTLOOK, HISTORICAL DIRECTION

A third reason why I am optimistic about the future of cognitive reverence for the Bible is twofold. It is the historic position of the church, and it is being reaffirmed by world church drift.

1. *Inerrancy: Manufactured in the Nineteenth Century?* As for the church's historic position, we will continue to hear misrepresentations of a high view of Scripture such as this one by Harvey commenting on inerrancy, which he terms a "tactic" devised in the nineteenth century "to restore an element of allegedly damaged or neglected 'holiness' by claiming that the text of Scripture is 'inerrant.'"³² One hardly knows where to begin in chiseling that statement into a closer facsimile of accuracy, but a good starting point is John Woodbridge's essay "Evangelical Self-Identity and

³¹ Of Faragau, Radu Gheorghita states in private correspondence: "His activity is more fruitful and intense than the rest of us [Romanians with Ph.D.s] put together."

³² Harvey, *Is Scripture Still Holy?* 8. This tired historiography is echoed, e.g., in Hays and Ansberry, eds., *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* 2; they cast inerrancy in North America as "a reaction to the rise of historical criticism."

the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy” in a 2011 D. A. Carson *Festschrift*.³³ There can be no question of who is closer to the church’s historic position on Scripture: Harvey with the tiny degree to which he is willing to concede that Scripture might perhaps retain “authority for us today” despite all its “strangeness” and “contradictions,”³⁴ on the one hand, or those who affirm its reliability and veracity in a sweeping way. Woodbridge exposes the kind of historiography that Harvey appears to draw on in a section called “The New View of Biblical Inerrancy.”³⁵ The bulk of his essay then goes on to cite dozens of sources from Augustine onward who affirm infallibility and/or inerrancy, the two concepts often being articulated interchangeably in the history of the discussion.

Woodbridge’s work points to the fact that the church has survived at all in large measure because of its historic reflex toward according cognitive reverence to the Bible. It is true that that reflex has been quashed in mainstream circles since Enlightenment times. But it is also true that mainstream churches with a low view of the Bible’s veracity by historic measure have long been in numeric decline of such magnitude that terms like death spiral may suggest themselves.

2. *Direction of the church globally.*

a. *Drift or detonation?* This brings us to world church drift. Patrick Johnstone in *The Future of the Global Church* writes of “the expansion of the mission force in the 20th century.”³⁶ He states:

The mobilization of Christians in missions since 1900 has been astonishing. From 17,400 in 1900, the number rose slowly to 43,000 in 1962, but then came the explosive growth that followed the Awakening around that time, with some 200,000 [missionaries] in 2000 and maybe even 300,000 in 2010. This has happened even as non-evangelical denominational missions collapsed, with the new wave of fervent evangelical missionaries more than replacing them.³⁷

Rather than world church drift, perhaps we should speak here of world church explosion. This has not been an explosion of missionaries going forth with either a message or a Bible whose truth at any given point they might challenge or doubt. Rather, the direction of things has been toward a high view of Scripture more like the Chicago Statement than like the apologies for an errant Bible that proliferate in Western academic circles. Multinational cognitive reverence for the Bible is integral to the astonishing spread of Christian conviction in recent generations.

It is true that Michael Bird claims that his critical stance toward Chicago Statement inerrancy “approximates the view of Scripture held by the *majority* of

³³ John Woodbridge, “Evangelical Self-Identity and the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy,” in Köstenberger and Yarbrough, *Understanding the Times* 104–38.

³⁴ Harvey, *Is Scripture Still Holy?* 146.

³⁵ Woodbridge, “Evangelical Self-Identity and the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy” 107–10.

³⁶ Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011) 228.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

evangelicals who make up the global evangelical church.”³⁸ On the other hand, Korean-American NT scholar Sydney Park, who teaches at Beeson Divinity School and belongs to ETS, writes, “When I met Evangelicals from Finland, Ghana, India at the Lausanne Conference in 2010 I discovered that they were theologically much more conservative than US evangelicals, especially in their high view of Scripture.”³⁹ Since Bird is actually not far from the Chicago Statement with his own affirmation of “the *infallibility* and *authority* of Scripture,”⁴⁰ perhaps there is a measure of truth in both Bird’s and Park’s perceptions.

b. *Religion of an authoritative Bible.* The direction of the world church can be glimpsed by looking at faculty now teaching at institutions that uphold inerrancy. Just in one department at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, the NT department, there is a native of Hong Kong, of Singapore, and perhaps most shocking, of French Canada. Until recently, there was a German. The dean of Trinity is an African, Dr. Tite Tiénou, and there are other internationals on the faculty. In my own seminary, Covenant in St. Louis, a third of our full-time faculty this semester are not from the US, and over half of our current faculty received our terminal degrees outside the US. The demographics of evangelical institutions across the board in North America, including more and more of our churches with their immigrant infusion, are rapidly bearing out Lamin Sanneh’s answer to the question, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?*⁴¹ Answer: not the religion of the white Westerner.

Yet I think reviewers have failed to highlight one of the major reasons Sanneh gives for what he calls “historic expansion” of Christianity in recent generations. Sanneh writes in this book’s last paragraph, “Bible translation enabled Christianity to break the cultural filibuster of its Western domestication to create movements of resurgence and renewal that transformed the religion into a world faith.”⁴² We should tweak that: recent expansion did not transform Christianity into a world faith; it had always been one.

Nevertheless, Sanneh is correct that every word of the Bible in its original language translated into words in other languages fueled what Johnstone calls the Sixth Global Awakening after 1964.⁴³ In speaking of “the influence of the Bible” on what he calls Christianity’s “renewal growth,” Johnstone coordinates terms like “deadening liberal theology,” “mainline Protestantism,” “decline,” and “Bible viewed cautiously or negatively,” “subordinate to tradition, custom, human reason, etc.”⁴⁴ On the other hand, he points out that the Sixth Global Awakening “leads to the translating of the Bible into many new languages and a big increase in the num-

³⁸ Michael F. Bird, “Inerrancy Is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism Outside the USA” 145.

³⁹ Personal correspondence.

⁴⁰ See n. 25 above.

⁴¹ Lamin O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁴² *Ibid.* 130.

⁴³ Johnstone, *Future of the Global Church* 123.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

ber of evangelized non-Christians.” Johnstone speaks here of “Bible-centered Christians,” “Bible viewed positively,” and “Bible the ultimate authority.”⁴⁵

c. *International inerrancy*. Michael Bird may be correct that “Inerrancy Is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism Outside the USA,”⁴⁶ but that may be mainly a quibble over terminology. De facto the Bible is being read in fervently believing ways in the global South, as Philip Jenkins underscored in *The New Faces of Christianity*,⁴⁷ and churches are growing. It is hard to deny there is some connection. Brian Stanley makes the same observation regarding African Christianity in his book *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*.⁴⁸ He also points to many possible pitfalls and ambiguities regarding where things are headed, though in speaking of “diffusion” and “disintegration” he focuses mostly on traditional evangelicalism in the West.⁴⁹

As for Asia, the situation is almost too vast even to mention, but I cannot resist calling attention to Christopher E. M. Wigram’s painstaking documentation of the role of the Bible for J. Hudson Taylor and the early China Inland Mission. While critical of Taylor at many points, Wigram makes clear that “for Taylor the words of scripture were the very words of God.”⁵⁰ Korean theologian Moonjang Lee suggests something like this is more or less pan-Asian, not because of Hudson Taylor but because of the Asian religious and cultural point of view, namely, that “religious commitment in Asia entails the acceptance of the authority of the sacred books of one’s community, whether it is Christian, Buddhist, or any other.”⁵¹ For this reason, he continues, “the authority and eternal relevance of the Bible is not usually questioned or challenged among Asian Christians, except by those under outside influence from training in Western critical scholarship.”⁵²

No human knows the future. We should not romanticize global South Christian spread; as Brian Stanley perceptively notes, there is a sense in which “the battle for the integrity of the gospel,” and we might add a faithful regard for Scripture, “in the opening years of the twenty-first century is being fought not primarily in the lecture rooms of North American seminaries but in the shanty towns, urban slums and villages of Africa, Asia and Latin America.”⁵³

Yet today and in at least the near future, the stock of cognitive reverence for the Bible is rising in world Christian terms. Whereas Harvey seems to affirm the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bird, “Inerrancy Is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism Outside the USA” 145.

⁴⁷ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (History of Evangelicalism 5; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013) 117-20.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 235-47. But see warnings on 247.

⁵⁰ Christopher E. M. Wigram, *The Bible and Mission in Faith Perspective: J. Hudson Taylor and the Early China Inland Mission* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2007) 246.

⁵¹ Moonjang Lee, “Reading the Bible in the Non-Western Church: An Asian Dimension,” in *Mission in the Twenty-first Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (ed. Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008) 150.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Stanley, *Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism* 247.

secularizing hypothesis that in a world come of age the Christian holy Scriptures *per se* are *passé*, Martin Marty counters:

For me, “the world that has come of age” is a historical judgment of great resonance in the parts of the world that were most immediate to Bonhoeffer, but anyone with a global vision will find evidence that it was off the mark in a world in which both “the secular” and “the religious” increase in power. It is not “a religionless world” and is not becoming one.⁵⁴

To extend that: it is not a Scripture-less world, in the high sense of Scripture seen globally today, and it is not clear that it is on the way to becoming one.

VII. CONCLUSION

Gary Dorrien has rendered the immense service of delineating the origin and main features of the modern Western theology that reveres its own constructs rather than some formerly “holy” Scripture. In his book *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology*,⁵⁵ Dorrien lists the foundational guides for Western Protestantism in its eventual Ritschlian manifestation still substantially with us today. These guides are not Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; they are not Moses, Isaiah, Paul, and Jesus Christ. They are rather Kant, Schleiermacher, Schelling, and Hegel. Cognitive reverence for the Bible is not part of Dorrien’s story, for “all claims to truth, in theology and other disciplines, must be made on the basis of reason and experience, not by appeal to external authority” such as the Bible.⁵⁶ Many in theological and biblical scholarship around the world follow Dorrien in this seriously attenuated view of scriptural authority. Scripture is no authority for human cognition.

I have given three reasons why despite a hegemony’s pessimism about the Bible, there is a bright future for cognitive reverence for it. Inerrancy in nuanced forms can be affirmed for the reasons already argued. There are other reasons as well. Two scholars from within the mainstream of the European university, Ulrich Wilckens⁵⁷ and Klaus Berger,⁵⁸ have recently published substantial critiques of NT scholarship and its destructive hermeneutical tendencies. In key places we see redemptive dissent in post-Christian ranks.

Positively, today like never before there are scholarly resources informed by their authors’ high view of Scripture that are great aids to Christian history, understanding, faith, and much more. Whether Eckhard Schnabel on the early history of Christian missions, Craig Keener on miracles, Vern Poythress on worldview and the Gospels, Stanley Porter on linguistics and lexicography, Darrell Bock, Craig Keener, and Craig Evans and many others on the historical Jesus, N. T. Wright and

⁵⁴ Martin Marty, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Letters and Papers from Prison: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011) 239.

⁵⁵ Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). For a review see *Theo* 37 (2012) 552–56.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 4.

⁵⁷ Wilckens, *Kritik der Bibelkritik*.

⁵⁸ Klaus Berger, *Die Bibelfälscher: Wie wir um die Wahrheit betrogen werden* (Munich: Pattloch, 2013).

Michael Licona on the resurrection, Kevin Vanhoozer and many others on hermeneutics, Doug Sweeney, Gerald McDermott, Michael McClymond, and others on Jonathan Edwards, and scholars like those I have already mentioned on inerrancy and others like the plenary speakers at this conference,⁵⁹ we have a firm foundation for expanding on the reverent heritage toward God's word we have received.

I do not deny that we need continual refinement in our views. Challenges and opportunities arise constantly. The Chicago statements on inerrancy and hermeneutics, while compelling, can be improved upon. But I think Jesus' response to the devil is suggestive for our response to calls to lighten up on our high view of the Bible. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4 ESV). Jesus regarded Scripture as words from God's mouth. That should be understood analogically, of course, and not crudely literally, but the integral link between God and divine enscripturated speech remains.

I am optimistic that Jesus' approach to the Tanach, already revered as holy in his day, retains value for Jesus' followers as they approach the whole canon of writings acknowledged in the Bible of the church. Let me put that more strongly: in light of Jesus' dogged recourse to written Scripture from his temptation to his scriptural words from the cross, how is something like inerrancy not an entailment of discipleship? Kevin Vanhoozer poses the question this way: "how can we follow Jesus if we cannot follow with the utmost trust the words that oriented his own life?"⁶⁰

VIII. ECCLESIAL POSTSCRIPT

To some extent our view of all this will depend on whose ecclesia we commit to. There is a well-established ecclesia of the academy. We all respect it; many of us are participatory in it. But should we give it the allegiance it frequently demands? Ernst Troeltsch famously said, "If you give it your little finger, you must also give it your entire hand."⁶¹ If we do, we can hardly continue to revere the Jesus of Matthew 4 as Lord, at least when it comes to his view of Scripture. Christ grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man, but he never came of age. The hegemonic "we" of the academy's ecclesia has.

But there is another ecclesia. I see it at the pastoral level wherever God's people affirm Scripture's teaching, call, commands, and story over their own desires, self-interest, rationalizations, and cultural myths. For me this ecclesia is especially typified by a congregation in Muslim Africa whose members have suffered much at the hands of government security over the past year. Like most believers I have

⁵⁹ I.e. Don Carson, John Frame, and Ben Witherington III.

⁶⁰ Personal correspondence, November 11, 2013.

⁶¹ "On the Historical and Dogmatic Methods in Theology," translation by Jack Forstman of Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1913) 2:728-53, accessed at <http://faculty.tcu.edu/grant/hhit/Troeltsch,%20On%20the%20Historical%20and%20Dogmatic%20Methods.pdf>. The quote is on page 5 of the online posting. The same line is translated "Give the historical method an inch and it will take a mile" in Gregory W. Dawes, ed., *The Historical Jesus Quest* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999) 35.

encountered in Africa in service there going back to 1989, for them the Bible is simply true, across the board. They would die for that. Some have, and more will. Inerrancy is a given.

When I taught Muslim background believers in that venue by night, the church trusted that I would defend the truth of what the Bible says as the church has historically confessed: yes, God has a Son. Yes, the Trinity is a biblical doctrine. Yes, Paul wrote the NT epistles that bear his name. Yes, the Bible is the unique authoritative word of God. It was not easy for the church to uphold such views in that setting, nor was my teaching there an effortless exercise.

For their part, when security came calling during my last visit one year ago this month, local church leaders trusted God and his sure word enough for their ultimate protection to cover for me and a colleague so we could get to the airport and out of the country, barely. While we did not know it at the time, the local believers were left to bear the brunt of hours of interrogation and in some cases lengthy incarceration. They are not yet out of the woods, a whole year later.

Western academicians can afford to pit Jesus against the Bible and deprivilege a once-holy Scripture in myriad other ways. They may curry favor and arrive at gain for doing so. But in today's world church, there is room for a scholarly society that tries to match the conviction and courage of millions elsewhere whose actions model for us a noble if costly cognitive reverence for the Bible.