

THE RESURGENCE OF NEO-EVANGELICALISM: CRAIG BLOMBERG’S LATEST BOOK AND THE FUTURE OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

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The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy sought to ward off the influence of neo-evangelical theology rising in many American and European seminaries. The result was the well-known Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. For framers of the CSBI, inerrancy was considered a watershed issue and a mark of both evangelical identity and consistency. However, today, many self-professed evangelical theologians and seminaries, many of whom still claim the label “inerrantist,” are turning away from their evangelical heritage by their “non-inerrantist” affirmations and hermeneutics, resulting in the resurgence of neo-evangelical theology. This article argues that Craig Blomberg’s book, Can We Still Believe the Bible? represents this trend and illustrates the resurgence of neo-evangelical theology.

Introduction

Current controversy over the total truthfulness and full integrity of the Scriptures points to a truth many younger evangelicals may not know, i.e., the historic debates that took place over the inerrancy of the Bible in evangelicalism were a major issue for the last half of the twentieth century.

As in the Reformation of the sixteenth century, participants of the inerrancy battles since the 1950s recognized that to be divided over the formal principle of the authority of Scripture was, inevitably, to be divided over the material principles of doctrine as well. Moderates and conservatives in the overall movement of evangelicalism were divided over controversial issues ranging from abortion rights, the exclusivity of the gospel, and the nature of the atonement. As might be expected, with the compromise of any true commitment to biblical authority, evangelical *consistency* and *authenticity* faced similar division and compromise.

While theological institutions and self-professed evangelicals scattered throughout mainline denominations were tempted to revise their statements of faith

in order to meet the demands of the moderate worldview, Francis Schaeffer penned his book, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, in 1982. Schaeffer writes:

Within evangelicalism there are a growing number who are modifying their views on the inerrancy of the Bible so that the full authority of Scripture is completely undercut. But it is happening in very subtle ways. . . . What may seem like a minor difference at first [amongst competing views of Scripture by evangelicals], in the end makes all the difference in the world. It makes all the difference, as we might expect, in things pertaining to theology, doctrine and spiritual matters, but it also makes all the difference in things pertaining to the daily Christian life and how we as Christians are to relate to the world around us. In other words, *compromising the full authority of Scripture eventually affects what it means to be a Christian theologically and how we live in the full spectrum of human life.*¹

As moderate views spread throughout the United States, some evangelical institutions adopted European models of biblical authority by rejecting an uncompromised commitment to biblical inerrancy and proposing infallibilist views of scriptural authority.² Ground zero for this effort was Fuller Theological Seminary. Fuller was by no means a liberal institution during the 1970s, but as Harold Lindsell argues in *The Battle for the Bible*, an inevitable crisis occurred over the inerrancy of Scripture and theological boundaries that once marked evangelicalism.³ Prominent names favoring the shift were faculty members such as Dan Fuller, George Eldon Ladd, Jack Rogers, and Donald McKim. These individuals, along with other moderate evangelicals over the course of the successive generations, influenced a host of institutions and seminarians beyond the Fuller campus. In particular, this involves present-day evangelicals such as Craig Blomberg, Darrell Bock, and Michael Licona (either intentionally or unintentionally).

International Council on Biblical Inerrancy

In order to combat the growing tide of biblical errancy in evangelicalism, individuals such as James Boice, Norman Geisler, Carl F. H. Henry, Kenneth Kantzer, Harold Lindsell, Roger Nicole, J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, and Francis Schaeffer met in the fall of 1978 producing the historic “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy”

¹ Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, “The Great Evangelical Disaster” (Wheaton: Crossway, 1982), 4:328, emphasis added.

² The irony about committing oneself to an infallibilist as opposed to an inerrantist view is that etymologically and in theory, infallibility is a stronger term than inerrancy. Infallibility has to do with the fact that Scripture cannot err, whereas inerrancy claims that Scripture did not err. Infallibility speaks about the potential of Scripture to err, namely, it cannot. Inerrancy means that the final result is without error. For example, there are times when I compose inerrant grocery lists and times when I compose errant grocery lists. The reason for the difference is because I am fallible; hence, I can sometimes not err however I have the ability to err. But, if I were infallible I would always not err. And when it comes to the text of Scripture, since God is the primary author of Scripture, the reason it does not contain errors is because God cannot err.

³ Harold Lindsell, *The Battle For The Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 106–21.

(CSBI). The essence of what the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) stood for appears in "A Short Statement," produced at the summit meeting:

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. 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.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

Looking at the ICBI, now more than a quarter century later, at stake in the formation of the CSBI were indeed real and crucial theological concerns. Methodologically and strategically, the axiom of inerrancy was viewed both as an article of faith and a guideline of biblical interpretation to safeguard the belief that in all the inspired texts, whatever their literary genre and style, God still speaks His mind to humanity through the agency of human writers, culminating in the communication of errorless, cognitive-propositional revelation. In each of these ways, then, belief in the inerrancy of Scripture determines the basic attitudes of exegetes and provides a stabilizing influence on the faith of the church and evangelical identity. However, amongst present-day evangelicals, there seems to be an array of evangelical scholars, in particular Craig Blomberg, who no longer desires to carry on the legacy of the ICBI and the torch of the CSBI.⁴ Consequently, their publications indicate there are formal differences between evangelicals pertaining to the doctrine of Scripture and material theological differences over core evangelical beliefs.⁵

⁴ For example, in the book *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, both Michael Bird and Peter Enns are clear they do not want to carry the torch of inerrancy as defined by the ICBI and CSBI forward. See Stanley N. Gundry, ed. *Five Views On Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). See also J. I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

⁵ Craig Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide The Divide: A Mormon & an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1997). Kenton J. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

Craig Blomberg's *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*

Craig Blomberg, professor of New Testament at Denver Theological Seminary, recently published a book titled, *Can We Still Believe The Bible? An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions*. The overall purpose of the book is to offer evangelicals reasons to believe the Bible by engaging both liberal and conservative scholarship. Evangelical engagement with liberal academia is nothing new; however, for our purposes, what is unique about Blomberg's approach is the way he attempts to engage with conservative evangelical scholarship. He writes:

A handful of very conservative Christian leaders who have not understood the issues adequately have reacted by unnecessarily rejecting the new developments. To the extent that they, too, have often received much more publicity than their small numbers would warrant, they have hindered genuine scholarship among evangelicals and needlessly scared away unbelievers away from the Christian faith. As my Christian eighth-grade public school history teacher, Dorothy Dunn, used to love to intone with considerable passion, after having lived through our country's battles against both Nazism and Communism: 'The far left and the far right—avoid them both, like the plague!'⁶

Blomberg cites Norman Geisler, Albert Mohler, Danny Akin, Robert Thomas, David Farnell, and myself (William Roach) as examples of these very conservative scholars.⁷ He charges Geisler, Farnell, Thomas, and myself with making "attacks" against his writings and those by other evangelical writers such as Darrell Bock, D. A. Carson, and Craig Keener as being too liberal and threatening inerrancy, or denying the historicity of Scripture.⁸

Unsurprisingly, Blomberg continues to discuss my recently co-authored publication with Norman Geisler titled, *Defending Inerrancy*.⁹ He claims:

In his most recent book on inerrancy, Norman Geisler joins William Roach to criticize the work of a variety of scholars ranging all the way from Bart Ehrman, self-confessed agnostic and ex-evangelical who would strongly disavow inerrancy.

Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible? An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014), 7–8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7–8, 10–11, 120, 142–45, 166–68, 213–14, 222, 249–50, 254–55, 261–64, 272–73.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 120, 175. I'm still amazed each time I read this comment because I'm left asking myself, "Where did Dr. Geisler and I ever criticize D. A. Carson or Craig Keener?" I can understand the comments about Bock, since we have an entire chapter dedicated to the way his new "quest" undermines the CSBI. However, not once did we even mention Craig Keener's name in our book! D. A. Carson is only mentioned one time in the book on page 19. Contrary to Blomberg's claim, we cite him favorably. Personally, I have respected and admired Carson's commitment to biblical authority and inerrancy and commend his works to the evangelical world.

⁹ Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

rancy, to Darrell Bock, Dallas Seminary professor and one of the world's leading inerrantist New Testament scholars. Apparently unable to distinguish between genuine contradictions of inerrancy and legitimate in-house inerrantist debates on exegetical, hermeneutical, or methodological questions, Geisler and Roach tar all those they criticize with the same brush. Whether those criticized recognize it or not, Geisler and Roach count them as having denied or threatened inerrancy.¹⁰

Blomberg believes publications such as *Defending Inerrancy* or *The Jesus Crisis*, cause grave problems for evangelicalism. He claims, "If Farnell, Thomas, and Geisler and Roach [sic] were to be consistent and chastise every Old and New Testament commentator whose views match those they demonize, they would scarcely find a biblical scholar left in the Evangelical Theological Society who would pass muster in their eyes."¹¹ Blomberg offers examples of this "demonization" by appealing to the vote to remove Robert Gundry from ETS and the controversy at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School with Murray Harris over the nature of the bodily resurrection.¹² In addition, Blomberg believes our publications stifle scholarship and serve as roadblocks keeping unbelievers from embracing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Evaluation—*Can We Still Believe The Bible?*

Blomberg has every right to try and make his case, but his arguments about those he labels as "very conservative" or "extreme" are alarmist and factually inaccurate. Far more than that, his arguments reveal that he and other prominent evangelical scholars and institutions have much more in common with Fuller's neo-evangelicalism, and in fact indicate a resurgence of neo-evangelical theology. The ICBI arose to address specifically these types of trends within evangelicalism; however, it seems individuals like Blomberg are now willing to move beyond the vision and legacy of classic evangelicalism and the ICBI.¹³ This point will be substantiated by the following three statements.¹⁴

1. Blomberg Unmistakably Desires to Chart a Version of Evangelicalism without Making Inerrancy a Theological Boundary.

¹⁰ Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, 142.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 166–68; 213–14; 222.

¹³ For example, the Preface to the CSBI states, "The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstanding of this doctrine in the world at large."

¹⁴ The ICBI and CSBI are used as the litmus test for the place inerrancy has to mark out evangelical identity and consistency because it is the official view of ETS.

In the Articles of Affirmation and Denial found in the CSBI, the ICBI sought to communicate at least two “essential” truths. First, belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is not a salvific essential of the Christian faith. Hence, one can deny the inerrancy of Scripture and still be considered a Christian. It seems like many advocates of Blomberg’s view of neo-evangelical theology believe this is the charge being labeled against their views, however, it is not. Instead, what is being claimed is their views are changing theological boundaries that have historically marked evangelicalism (a.k.a., an uncompromised commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture to mark out evangelical *identity* and *consistency*). Second, belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is vital to the health and overall well-being of the Christian faith and the local church. These two truths are made clear in Article XIX of the CSBI. It reads:

- WE AFFIRM that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.
- WE DENY that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.

Article XIX speaks to the *functional* authority of inerrancy within the life of the church. It recognizes that belief in the inerrancy of Scripture affects both the totality of the individual believer’s life and the corporate life of the church. In addition, the CSBI’s official commentary goes on to state, “The framers of the confession are saying unambiguously that confession of belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is not an essential of the Christian faith necessary for salvation. We gladly acknowledge that people who do not hold to this doctrine may be earnest and genuine, zealous and in many ways dedicated Christians. We do not regard acceptance of inerrancy to be a test for salvation.”¹⁵ In the following section of the commentary, Sproul writes:

However, we urge as a committee and as an assembly that people consider the severe consequences that may befall the individual or church which casually and easily rejects inerrancy. We believe that history has demonstrated again and again that there is all too often a close relationship between rejection of inerrancy and subsequent defection from matters of the Christian faith that are essential to salvation. When the church loses its confidence in the authority of sacred Scripture the church inevitably looks to human opinion as its guiding light. When that happens, the purity of the church is directly threatened. Thus, we urge upon our Christian brothers and sisters of all professions and denominations to join with us in a reaffirmation of the full authority, integrity, infallibility and inerrancy of sacred Scripture to the end that our lives may be brought under the authority of God’s Word, that we may glorify Christ in our lives, individually and corporately as the church.¹⁶

¹⁵ R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy* (Orlando: Ligonier Ministry, 1980), 56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

The key points from this commentary are: (1) The committee as a whole compiled this Article and the correct interpretation of it is found in the official commentary. In the Foreword to *Explaining Inerrancy*, Sproul offers a list of the following individuals who served on the draft committee of the CSBI: Drs. Edmund P. Clowney, Norman L. Geisler, Harold W. Hoehner, Donald E. Hoke, Roger R. Nicole, James I. Packer, Earl D. Radmacher, and R. C. Sproul.¹⁷ The point being, if someone does not understand the Articles of Affirmation and Denial from the CSBI, consult the official ICBI commentary. If someone still does not understand the Articles, there are living framers from the draft committee who can shed light upon the CSBI. (2) The Article speaks to the personal and institutional effects of either casually or explicitly denying the inerrancy of Scripture. (3) The Article and commentary note that history records incidents from both individuals and institutions who have wavered on the inerrancy of Scripture, to then in turn, waver on one or more essential tenets of the Christian faith.¹⁸ And it is in that sense the purity of the church and the confessional integrity of institutions are compromised. Moreover, the committee argues that it is not a slippery slope to claim, “If one denies inerrancy, then inevitably, they will start denying other tenets of the Christian faith.” The reason is because “. . . history has demonstrated again and again that there is all too often a close relationship between rejection of inerrancy and subsequent defection from matters of the Christian faith that are essential to salvation.”¹⁹ Therefore, this claim (that denying the inerrancy of Scripture has negative effects upon the church) is a historically informed observation, not an unjustified or factually unsubstantiated claim.

Consequently, what is in purview in this Article is a commitment to the *functional* authority of Scripture in the body of Christ. The CSBI argues that history has demonstrated time and time again, as the inerrancy of Scripture goes, so too, goes the purity of the church.²⁰ For that reason, many evangelical schools, churches, and organizations such as ETS, have required their constituents to affirm without reservation a commitment to biblical inerrancy, in order to preserve institutional integrity and the doctrinal purity of the body of Christ.

Continuing his list of what he considers to be appropriate evangelical engagement with critical issues, Blomberg utilizes some very specific language in order to distinguish himself from “very conservative scholarship” and “watchdog” mentalities. He dedicates his book to the faculty, administration, and trustees of Denver Theological Seminary for creating a “congenial” research environment, while upholding the inerrancy of Scripture without any of the “watchdog mentality that plagues so

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ A salvific essential is a doctrine that if removed undermines the Christian faith. For example, if someone denies the deity of Christ or sola fide, they have undermined an essential of the Christian faith. In addition, there are appropriate methodological considerations to consider. Namely, most evangelicals recognize that methodologically, the historical-grammatical method of interpretation is the proper method for arriving at the salvific essentials. While some may affirm a salvific essential without affirming the HGM, nonetheless, it is inconsistent with their method. See Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *Convictions Without Compromise: Standing Strong In The Core Beliefs Of The Christian Faith* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008).

¹⁹ Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 56–57.

²⁰ See Harold Lindsell's book, *The Battle For the Bible*.

many evangelical institutions.”²¹ Blomberg raises the question, “If a person must agree that the Bible is without error in order to hold a position with a school, church, or parachurch organization, doesn’t this put a virtual straightjacket on their research?”²² While he immediately answers this question, one must look throughout the book to find a comprehensive answer. Blomberg believes, “The answer depends almost entirely on whether or not there is good evidence for biblical inerrancy.”²³ He believes there is good evidence for inerrancy; however, this is precisely where he starts to show his neo-evangelical colors.

According to Blomberg, “. . . institutions or organizations that claim to abide by it [CSBI] must allow their inerrantist scholars the freedom to explore the various literary options without fear of reprisal. Ironically, when individuals draw boundaries of inerrancy more narrowly than this, it is *they* who have unwittingly denied inerrancy, at least as it is defined by the Chicago Statement!”²⁴ Later in the book, Blomberg illustrates his point by discussing the Michael Licona controversy within the SBC and how the leadership responded to Licona’s claim that Matt 27:51–53 represents a non-historical narrative typically featured in Greco-Roman literature *bios*. Blomberg writes:

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, fell into the same trap of censuring Licona, and even a New Testament scholar as sharp as Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, at least briefly jumped on the bandwagon, insisting that Licona could never teach full-time for him. All of this would be just plain silly if it were not so tragic and if people’s careers and livelihoods didn’t hang in the balance.²⁵

The point Blomberg tries to make in this quote is clear: The SBC and its leadership *wrongly terminated* and *censured* Licona from teaching at SBC institutions for his views on Matt 27:51–53. Clearly Blomberg believes the Licona controversy represents best the *way* evangelical institutions should *not* react to disagreements over literary options and the *way* they should not draw theological boundaries around the doctrine of inerrancy.

Blomberg is not done yet; he goes on to argue that Jesus actually rebukes religious leaders for drawing such theological boundaries and reacting in a confrontational manner.²⁶ He illustrates his point by drawing his reader’s attention to Jesus’ interaction with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and Paul’s interactions with the Judaizers. Blomberg writes, “In other words, receiving the most censure are fellow members of the same religious community who *occupy positions of Christian lead-*

²¹ Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, v.

²² *Ibid.*, 120–21.

²³ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 178. Italics in original.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 216–217.

ership and have created overly restrictive doctrinal boundaries and should know better.”²⁷ In brief, Blomberg believes organizations such as the SBC and leaders such as Mohler, Geisler and so forth, ought to know better and quit censuring fellow Christian scholars for crossing the so-called line of “inerrancy.”

Blomberg pays attention to the “Battles for the Bible” throughout evangelical organizations, and he clearly argues that inerrancy should no longer be considered a theological shibboleth. However, while there is much emotional thrust to his arguments, the weakness of Blomberg’s approach is that it offers no actual theological boundaries to map out evangelicalism. While belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is not a salvific essential, historically it has been essential to understand properly the nature of evangelicalism. Attention to theological boundaries is not a matter of doctrinal policing; instead, it is necessary for the responsibility of any organization to make clear what they do and do not affirm. Without such a clear understanding of evangelicalism, the movement is left without doctrinal formulations or theological trajectories. In fact, the necessity of theological boundaries has been so crucial for evangelicalism that the Doctrinal Basis of ETS requires its members to affirm without reservation: (1) The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and therefore inerrant in the autographs. (Article III); (2) Every member must subscribe in writing annually to the Doctrinal Basis. (Article IV). In addition, ETS also adopted the CSBI as its official guide to understand inerrancy.

My own theological pilgrimage reflects this continual struggle with questions relating to theological boundaries and evangelical identity. For the last several years, I have studied at a Southern Baptist seminary. Throughout our studies, students are reminded of the theological and political battles that mark the Conservative Resurgence. Crucial to the overall success of the Conservative Resurgence was an uncompromised commitment to the total truthfulness and complete accuracy of the Scriptures. There were so-called moderates and conservatives lined up on each side arguing their case for their own theological boundaries and trajectory of the denomination.²⁸ However, if anything became clear in the SBC, inerrancy provided the necessary foundation to promote a coherent and unified theological vision to recover the denomination and respective seminaries from theological moderates. Much like the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the principle divisions in the SBC over the nature of the atonement, the factuality of the resurrection, the historicity of events recorded in both the Old and New Testaments, and so forth, represent the underlying disagreement over the formal cause of biblical authority and the nature of Baptist identity.

Despite the fact that Blomberg believes his model of biblical authority is going to allow for so-called “scholarship” to flourish, he must realize that the history of the church, and the SBC in particular, indicates that such theological concessions come with a price. The price is typically theological moderates become theological liberals, and unbelievers do not become believers, because as the integrity of the Scriptures

²⁷ Ibid., 217. Italics in original.

²⁸ David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 177–216.

goes, so too goes the unvarnished gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁹ Returning to Blomberg's use of the Licona controversy and his chiding of individuals such as Mohler and Geisler for drawing theological boundaries around Licona, he is forgetting a few key things.

First, Blomberg has never sat in the seat of a seminary president or president of ETS. One of the primary responsibilities of a president is to protect the confessional integrity of their institution or organization. Should a president believe a professor or a view oversteps the theological boundaries of that institution, he has every right and the moral responsibility to enforce his authority and remove that individual. Second, Blomberg forgets that Licona made these concessions within a denomination that has already fought the "Battle for the Bible" and landed on the side of both inerrancy and theological boundaries.³⁰ Clearly, those in SBC leadership believe Licona's views not only undermine the inerrancy of Scripture, but cross a theological boundary established by the Conservative Resurgence. Last but not least, it is apparent that Blomberg does not approve of hard and fast theological boundaries. But that makes me wonder if Blomberg would oppose the hiring of Norman Geisler, David Farnell, Robert Thomas, Albert Mohler or myself (William Roach) at Denver Theological Seminary. If he has no problems, then he is acting consistent with his "no watchdog" mentality. However, if he excludes any or all of us from the institution based upon our views, then he is guilty of drawing theological boundaries and enacting the same "watchdog" mentality he encourages other evangelical institutions to avoid.

At stake in Article XIX of the CSBI is a warning about the effects of denying the inerrancy of Scripture and downplaying the necessity of drawing theological boundaries. In the cases presented above, history indicates that once biblical authority is compromised it has the potential to open Pandora's Box to unorthodox and sometimes heretical theological concessions. In other words, in order for evangelicals to proclaim, "Jesus is Lord" and "Jesus is risen," it requires an uncompromised commitment to, "The Bible says." And central to evangelicals affirming, "The Bible

²⁹ Blomberg even concedes the point that he would affirm non-evangelical views of Scripture such as neo-orthodoxy before moving towards liberalism. He writes, "If I became convinced of a handful of fairly trivial errors in the Bible, I would opt for an infallibilist position (see chap. 4 above) instead. If I felt that some of these errors were more serious, I would fall back on neo-orthodoxy. If that became too much of a stretch, I would explore accommodationism or even more liberal Christian epistemologies." *Can We Still Believe the Bible*, 222. In addition, if one reads the works of Blomberg, he has even attempted to downplay the true divide between evangelicals and Mormons. However, the point needs to be made that when each community actually reflects the doctrinal convictions of their movements, they differ on the nature of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin, salvation, the nature of humanity, and almost every other orthodox doctrine of the Christian faith. At stake in the debate over theological boundaries is sometimes the very gospel itself! See Craig Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide The Divide?*; *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, 272.

³⁰ Licona knew that the SBC had clear and marked theological boundaries; however, he did not believe his use of genre-criticism overstepped one of those boundaries. Licona clearly knew that denying the bodily resurrection would cost him his job; nonetheless, Licona knew the SBC operated according to theological boundaries and policed them accordingly. See Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 132. Licona writes, "I presently enjoy a position of national leadership within the largest Protestant denomination in North America, a position for which I carry influence, am paid fairly and through which I find much satisfaction. I am aware that should my research lead me to the conclusion that Jesus did not rise from the dead I would be dismissed from my position and my employment would be terminated." *Ibid.*

says” is a commitment to the total truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Scriptures. This commitment undoubtedly requires evangelical institutions and organizations such as ETS to set and enforce theological boundaries such as inerrancy.³¹ Now is not the time for evangelicalism to compromise on these core commitments!³² However, since Blomberg does not believe inerrancy is a mark of evangelical consistency and identity, it aligns his position much closer to Fuller’s neo-evangelical theology than to the ICBI and classic evangelicalism.

2. Some Aspects of Blomberg’s Model Undermine the ICBI View of Inerrancy and Hermeneutics.

So as to not claim all of Blomberg’s book undermines the CSBI, it should be noted there are many commendable features to *Can We Still Believe The Bible?* His chapters on the transmission and canonicity of the text are phenomenal. The sections interacting with Bart Ehrman will serve the church for years to come because they address some of the most pressing issues raised by Ehrman-like scholarship. Unlike *The Lost World of Scripture* by John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, Blomberg still argues for the existence of the inerrant autographs of Scripture.³³ His sections on the canonicity of the text address some of the most pressing questions our culture raises against the Bible, such as: How many books? Was it a political game? What if we found another book? While I disagree with many of his conclusions over the proper philosophy of translation, namely, I believe formal equivalence represents best an inerrantist model for translation rather than the approach taken by the TNIV. Similarly, while I am a cessationist, I do believe Blomberg’s final chapter on miracles offers his readers valuable insights for why modernity does not *de jure* rule out the possibility of miracles. Clearly, Blomberg has thought about the issues and there are many areas we can lock arms to fight the battles raised against Christianity. Yet, at the same time, I and many other classic evangelicals cannot fully endorse Blomberg’s book because the *way* he understands and frames the inerrancy of Scripture undermines the confessional boundaries spelled out in the CSBI. This point is justified in the following four levels.

First Level: A Recapitulation of the Rogers/McKim Proposal

At the first level, Blomberg’s views raise serious doubts over the true origin of the twentieth-century evangelical view of Scripture. Like many evangelicals today,

³¹ Francis Beckwith resigned as the president of ETS because he converted to Roman Catholicism. See <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/mayweb-only/119-33.0.html>; <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/mayweb-only/119-32.0.html>; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/11/AR2007051101929.html>.

³² See Norman L. Geisler and F. David Farnell, eds., *The Jesus Quest: The Danger From Within* (Maitland: Xulon Press, 2014).

³³ Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, 37. See John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World Of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture And Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013).

Blomberg seems to believe the inerrantist view of Scripture finds its basis in philosophical and theological modernity. In particular, the Enlightenment, Thomas Reid's Common Sense Realism, and Scholastic Protestantism. Blomberg claims, "In short, if one tries to demonstrate that every major orthodox Christian thinker before the rise of modern biblical criticism spoke of the Scriptures as inerrant or adopted the four components of Feinberg's definition, one will fail."³⁴ To be fair to Blomberg, he does go onto say, "But it is difficult to find very many influential Christians throughout the first seventeen centuries of church history—that is, until the Scientific Enlightenment—who did not affirm in a fairly sweeping way the unique truthfulness, reliability, and trustworthiness of the sixty-six books of what came to be the Protestant Bible (debates about the Old Testament Apocrypha notwithstanding)."³⁵ He also claims that ancient authors were less precise in their writing and standards of precision than modern authors. While Blomberg's assessment might come close to the ICBI view, it nonetheless falls short.

First, the claim that the origin of the technical concept of inerrancy as defined by twentieth-century evangelicals arose from modernist thinking was first proposed by neo-evangelical theologians Jack Rogers and Donald McKim in their book titled, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*.³⁶ This proposal was thoroughly critiqued and frankly debunked by John Woodbridge's book, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*.³⁷ In addition, the ICBI responded by producing and inspiring a host of books defining and defending the inerrancy of Scripture against the Rogers/McKim proposal. In particular, the book titled *Inerrancy and the Church* edited by John D. Hannah, who like Woodbridge, argues that the CSBI view of inerrancy has been the position of the church from its inception. That being said, Blomberg's claim that prior to modern biblical criticism no one spoke of the scriptures as inerrant or they did not at least utilize the concepts of Feinberg's proposal, is factually inaccurate and reflects no significant interaction with the ICBI responses to the Rogers/McKim proposal.

Second, to claim the doctrine of inerrancy is a recent development arising from modernism fails to take many things into consideration. First of all, just because the creeds or specific writers did not utilize the "term" inerrancy, does not entail they were opposed to the concept of inerrancy. Second, the creeds do imply the inspiration (which implies its inerrancy) of the Bible. The inspiration of the Bible was commonly accepted by all of the orthodox fathers and framers of the creeds. Given there were no major challenges to it, the doctrine of inerrancy did not have to be further explained or defended. Third, while it is true that the term "inerrancy" nowhere appears in the Bible or in the writings of many writers, neither does the word "Trinity." We do not reject the Trinity because there were debates over the use of the term, later clarifications and further explanations of it, or because there is no formal creedal

³⁴ Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, 131.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

³⁷ John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

explanation of the doctrine until the fourth century. The issue is not whether a precise theological formulation arose later or it took the church longer to formulate a clearer definition. Instead, what matters is whether the truth of inerrancy is taught in the Bible and affirmed by orthodox theologians throughout church history. In brief, Blomberg seems to overlook the fact that the Rogers/McKim proposal is factually inaccurate and that every orthodox theologian down through the ages has affirmed the total truthfulness or inerrancy of Scripture.

Third, the ICBI explicitly dealt with the claim that inerrancy arose from modernist philosophy. Article XVI states:

- WE AFFIRM that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the church's faith throughout its history.
- WE DENY that inerrancy is a doctrine that was invented by scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

The official commentary indicates that Article XVI refers not to the word *inerrancy*, but the doctrine of inerrancy.³⁸ The commentary clarifies that the word *inerrancy* was not used with any degree of frequency and perhaps not even at all before the seventeenth century. Sproul writes:

[B]ut, [the commentary claims when using Luther as an example], Luther argued that the Scriptures never 'err.' To say that the Scriptures never err is to say nothing more nor less than that the Bible is inerrant. So though the word *inerrancy* is of relatively modern invention, the concept is rooted not only in the biblical witness to Scripture itself but also in the acceptance of the vast majority of God's people throughout the history of the Christian church.³⁹

The official commentary on the denial also argues that the doctrine of inerrancy is rooted in the Bible, not modernist philosophy. Sproul writes:

The denial is simply that inerrancy as a concept is not the product of a rigid, sterile, rationalistic approach to Scripture born of the scholastic movement of seventeenth-century Protestantism. Nor is it proper to understand the doctrine as a twentieth-century reaction to liberal theology or 'modernism.'⁴⁰

In summary, then, it becomes clear that while Blomberg might not claim to the same degree as Rogers and McKim that the doctrine of inerrancy was a by-product of modernism, he nonetheless favors the idea. During the height of the ICBI, scholars from all over the evangelical world arose to debunk the claim that inerrancy is a modern theological convention. As this first level makes clear, Blomberg's views on

³⁸ R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 51–52.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

the origin of inerrancy side with neo-evangelicalism and are at odds with the Article XVI of the CSBI and the official view of inerrancy affirmed by ETS.

Second Level: Undermining of the CSBI and CSBH

At the second level, many of Blomberg's exegetical conclusions undermine the CSBI understanding of inerrancy. Blomberg includes a chapter titled, "Aren't Several Narrative Genres of the Bible Unhistorical?"⁴¹ In this chapter, Blomberg discusses what he believes is the true nature of biblical genres and literary forms. He argues that many portions of Scripture present unhistorical narrative genres. For example, in his survey Blomberg presents the exegetical studies from scholars who view Genesis 1–3, including the fall of humanity, as unhistorical; deny the historical factuality of Job and Jonah; affirm that multiple authors penned the book of Isaiah; discusses the proper interpretation of Daniel and Apocalyptic literature; claim Matthew utilized midrashic approaches; the pseudonymous authorship of New Testament epistles; and the proper interpretation of the book of Revelation. In order to properly assess Blomberg's arguments, he must be quoted at length. Blomberg writes:

I have deliberately not taken a stand myself on any of the problems as I discussed them in this chapter. Because readers seem invariably curious, I will happily disclose where I come down at the moment, given the varying amounts of study I have devoted to each. I would support an old-earth creationism and opt for a combination of progressive creation and a literary-framework approach to Genesis 1. I lean towards Kidner's approach to Genesis 2–3 but am open to other proposals. I suspect that Jonah really intended to recount a miracle that really did happen, but with Job I gravitate more towards Longman's mediating approach. Despite the overwhelming consensus against it, I still find the arguments for the unity of Isaiah under a single primary author, even if lightly redacted later, more persuasive (or at least problematic) than most do. I remain pretty much baffled by Daniel 11; it is the issue I have researched by far the least. My inherent conservatism inclines me in the direction of taking it as genuine predictive prophecy, but I listen respectfully to those who argue for other interpretations and continue to mull them over. I reject Gundry's approach to Matthew as highly unlikely. I have yet to be persuaded by Licona's initial views of Matthew 27:51–53 but would love to see additional comparative research undertaken. I think good cases can still be mounted for the traditional ascriptions of authorship of the New Testament epistles, allowing for perhaps some posthumous editing of 2 Peter. And I refuse ever to be suckered back into the views of my young adult years, when I actually believed that the end would play out as Hal Lindsey claimed they would!⁴²

In other words, while Blomberg tries to chart a way forward that is still committed to the ICBI, nonetheless, he is open to a partial evolutionary account of Genesis and the

⁴¹ Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, 147–78.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 177.

origin of humanity, and leans towards Kidner's Neolithic view of Adam and Eve. While gravitating towards a historical Jonah, he is open to Longman's view of Job. Blomberg claims, "Longman concludes that we dare not be dogmatic, but he notes the view of the book as a *māšāl* (Hebrew for 'parable' and numerous other forms of figurative speech) goes back to the ancient Jewish midrashic and Talmudic literature (*b. Baba Batra* 15a; *y. Sotah* 5.8/20c; *Gen. Rab.* 57.4)."⁴³ Namely, he is open to a parabolic, non-historical Job. Last but not least, Blomberg is open to redaction criticism and posthumous editing of biblical books such as Isaiah, 2 Peter, and denies the historicity of the miracle account in Joshua 10.⁴⁴

While many features of Blomberg's assessment offer exegetical conclusions reconcilable with the CSBI, some of his conclusions undermine the CSBI. First, one of the underlying reasons Blomberg believes he can make these non-historical affirmations is because he believes the Bible presents non-historical narrative genres. During the Summit II meeting of the ICBI in 1982, the ICBI drafted what is known as "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics" (CSBH). Much like the CSBI, the CSBH utilizes clear affirmations and denials. Article XIII of the statement claims:

- WE AFFIRM that awareness of literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence we value genre criticism as one of the many disciplines of biblical study.
- WE DENY that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual.

Similar to the CSBI, the CSBH has an official commentary. This time the ICBI chose Norman Geisler to write the commentary. When discussing Article XIII of the CSBH, Geisler writes:

The awareness of what kind of literature one is interpreting is essential to a correct understanding of a text. A correct genre judgment should be made to ensure correct understanding. A parable, for example, should not be treated like a chronicle, nor should poetry be interpreted as though it were a straightforward narrative. Each passage has its own genre, and the interpreter should be cognizant of the specific kind of literature it is as he attempts to interpret it. Without genre recognition the interpreter can be misled in his handling of the passage. For example, when the prophet speaks of 'trees clapping their hands' (Isa. 55:21) one could assume a kind of animism unless he recognized that this is poetry and not prose.

The Denial is directed at an illegitimate use of genre criticism by some who deny the truth of passages which are presented as factual. Some, for instance, take Adam to be a myth, whereas in Scripture he is presented as a real person.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 156–57.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

Others take Jonah to be an allegory when he is presented as a historical person and so referred to by Christ (Matt. 12:40–42). This Denial is an appropriate and timely warning not to use genre criticism as a cloak for rejecting the truth of Scripture.⁴⁵

Blomberg raises the question: Aren't several narrative genres of the Bible unhistorical? He answers with a clear, Yes! However, the ICBI as represented by the CSBH answers with a clear, No! What should be apparent is that Blomberg is moving away from the ICBI definition of inerrancy and approach to hermeneutics. Blomberg's conclusions in chapter five pit him against the denial of Article XIII from the CSBH, that states, "WE DENY that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual." In addition, Blomberg's conclusions also pit him against other articles of the CSBH.⁴⁶

Article XIV

- WE AFFIRM that the biblical record of events, discourses and sayings, though presented in a variety of appropriate literary forms, correspond to historical fact.

⁴⁵ R. C. Sproul and Norman L. Geisler, *Explaining Inerrancy: Official Commentary on the ICBI Statements* (Matthews: Bastion Books, 2013), 76.

⁴⁶ The CSBI also concedes to these points; however, in order to show that Blomberg's views undermine both the CSBI and CSBH, the CSBH has been chosen. In the Foreword to *Explaining Inerrancy*, on pages 9–10, Geisler writes: "From the beginning, the ICBI spelled out its commitment to the historicity of the biblical narratives. Article XVIII of The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) reads: 'We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricising, or counting its teaching, or rejecting its claim to authorship'" (emphasis added). The ICBI position became even more explicit in its Chicago Statement of Biblical Hermeneutics (1982). Article XIII declares: "We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual." Article XIV goes on to say, "We deny that any event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated" (emphasis added). The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is clear on this issue. "We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture" (ARTICLE XIII). "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" (ARTICLE IX). "We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science" (ARTICLE XII). "We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture" (ARTICLE XII).

The ICBI commentary adds, "Though 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" (Article XII). With regard to the historicity of the Bible, Article XIII in the commentary points out that we should not "take Adam to be a myth, whereas in Scripture he is presented as a real person." Likewise, it affirms that we should not "take Jonah to be an allegory when he is presented as a historical person and [is] so referred to by Christ." It adds, "We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood" (Article XII of the "Chicago Statement"). In short, the ICBI framers believed that using genre to deny any part of the historicity of the biblical record was a denial of inerrancy.

- WE DENY that any such event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated.⁴⁷

Article XIX

- WE AFFIRM that any preunderstanding which the interpreter brings to Scripture should be in harmony with scriptural teaching and subject to correction by it.
- WE DENY that Scripture should be required to fit alien preunderstandings, inconsistent with itself, such as naturalism, evolutionism, scientism, secular humanism, and relativism.⁴⁸

Article XX

- WE AFFIRM that since God is the author of all truth, all truths, biblical and extrabiblical, are consistent and coherent, and that the Bible speaks truth when it touches on matters pertaining to nature, history, or anything else. We further affirm that in some cases extrabiblical data have value for clarifying what Scripture teaches, and for prompting correction of faulty interpretations.
- WE DENY that extrabiblical views ever disprove the teaching of Scripture or hold priority over it.⁴⁹

Article XXII

- WE AFFIRM that Genesis 1–11 is factual, as is the rest of the book.
- WE DENY that the teachings of Genesis 1–11 are mythical and that scientific hypotheses about earth history or

⁴⁷ The CSBH commentary notes: “This article combines the emphases of Articles VI and XIII. While acknowledging the legitimacy of literary forms, this article insists that any record of events presented in Scripture must correspond to historical fact. That is, no reported event, discourse, or saying should be considered imaginary. The Denial is even clearer than the Affirmation. It stresses then any discourse, saying, or event reported in Scripture must actually have occurred. This means that any hermeneutic or form of biblical criticism which claims that something was invented by the author must be rejected. This does not mean that a parable must be understood to represent historical facts, since a parable does not (by its very genre) purport to report an event or saying but simply to illustrate a point.” *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁸ This Article has been chosen because Blomberg has leanings towards figurative approaches to Genesis and the historicity of Adam and Eve. His views are more closely aligned with naturalism and evolutionism than a biblical view of creation.

⁴⁹ Article XX was chosen because Blomberg is willing to allow extra-biblical views to disprove the teaching of Scripture, in fact, many of the hermeneutical practices hold priority over the clear teaching of narratives and figures deemed historical in the Bible.

the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation.⁵⁰

In summary then, it is apparent that Blomberg's views pertaining to the idea that the Bible contains non-historical narratives pits him against both the CSBI and the CSBH. The ICBI and official commentaries are not opposed to understanding the Bible according to its historical or literary context; in fact, that is the very nature of the "historical-grammatical" method of interpretation. However, books such as Blomberg's, while presenting a thorough overview of the current state of scholarship, serve as a reminder that one of the reasons the ICBI was formed was to combat the dehistoricizing of the Bible by neo-evangelical biblical scholars misappropriating genre criticism (e.g., non-historical narrative genres, midrash and so forth).

Third Level: Hermeneutics, Authorial Intent, and Inerrancy

At the third level, Blomberg's book illustrates the use and abuse of authorial intention by present-day evangelical scholars. In the introduction to *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible*, Earl Radmacher raises the questions: "Is 'authorial intention' a poor term to use for expressing the meaning of the author as found in the text? Does it lend itself to the more speculative historical-critical method?"⁵¹ Underlying the answers to these questions raised by scholars are various theories of truth, language, and hermeneutical methods. By way of historical purview, the framers of the CSBI believed in order to remain consistent with the CSBI, one must affirm there is a very specific relationship between inerrancy and hermeneutics. Sproul writes:

Inspiration without inerrancy is an empty term. Inerrancy without inspiration is unthinkable. The two are inseparably related. They may be distinguished but not separated. So it is with hermeneutics. We can easily distinguish between the inspiration and interpretation of the Bible, but we cannot separate them. Anyone can confess a high view of the nature of Scripture but the ultimate test of one's view of Scripture is found in the method of interpreting it. A person's hermeneutic reveals his view of Scripture more clearly than does an exposition of his view.⁵²

Much like Sproul, Blomberg notes the distinction between hermeneutics and inerrancy. However, unlike Sproul, Blomberg believes that most of the so-called "inerrancy" debates are really debates over hermeneutics. Blomberg writes:

⁵⁰ While Blomberg believes in the factuality of much of Genesis, his views about a Neolithic understanding of Adam and Eve and a literary framework theory of Genesis 1 undermine the historical factuality of Genesis. For that reason, this article was included in this list.

⁵¹ Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), xii.

⁵² R. C. Sproul, "Biblical Interpretation and the Analogy of Faith," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, eds. Roger R. Nicole & J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 134.

Third appears the phrase 'properly interpreted' [from Feinberg's definition of inerrancy]. Numerous competing theological and exegetical positions over the centuries have appealed to the inerrancy or trustworthiness of Scripture for their support; in reality they were debates over hermeneutics. . . . The same is true for many debates that involve the literary form or genre of various biblical passages or even entire books, as chapter 5 will discuss. 'Inerrancy' can be wielded as a blunt tool to hammer into submission people whose interpretations of passages differ from ours, when in fact the real issue is not whether a passage is true or not but what kind of truth it teaches.⁵³

For Blomberg, the axiom by which one knows whether or not the text is presenting factual history or not is authorial intention. When speaking about the CSBI and authorial intention, Blomberg believes, "If 'dehistoricizing' means regarding as unhistorical something that is intended to be taken as historical, then naturally that would be inconsistent with inerrancy."⁵⁴ Later on Blomberg tries to rescue authorial intention by appealing to the framers of the CSBI. He concludes that ". . . if the framers of the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy protest that their intention was never to allow for pseudonymity, then they have conceded that the key to interpreting a document (theirs included) is discerning the author's intention, not merely reading the words on a page of text."⁵⁵ Blomberg's quotes raise a series of questions about the relationship between authorial intention and the words of text on a page. Is meaning found in the text or is it found in the author's intention? Can meaning be found in both the text and the author's intention? Can the text mean something other than what it says? Can the text say something other than what the author meant? Questions like these and the issues raised by Blomberg will be addressed in the following section.

First, debates over the relationship between hermeneutics and inerrancy are important. There are times when individuals are not denying the inerrancy of Scripture due to difficult exegetical conclusions. For example, someone is not denying the inerrancy of Scripture if they come to a different conclusion whether Jesus is going to return before or after the millennium. That being said, one has to make it clear there are times when so-called "hermeneutics debates" are really debates over the inerrancy of the Scriptures. For example, there are true differences of opinion over the age of the earth and the length of days in Genesis. While individual's might hold strong, sometimes very strong, opinions over the interpretation of these texts, it would be incorrect to claim that someone is denying inerrancy for believing in an old earth versus a young earth.⁵⁶ On the other hand, it would be a denial of inerrancy if

⁵³ Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, 124–75.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁶ For example, during the time of the ICBI both R. C. Sproul and Walter Kaiser affirmed an old earth view of creation. Now, Sproul affirms a young earth view, whereas Kaiser maintains his old earth position. In addition, Norman Geisler and J. I. Packer affirm an old earth view of creation, whereas John MacArthur and R. Albert Mohler affirm a young earth creationism. In each of these cases, the participants affirm biblical inerrancy but they differ on the age of the earth. In addition, the CSBI and commentaries explicitly did not take a stance on the age of the earth because they noted that individuals such as B. B. Warfield affirmed inerrancy, yet held to an old earth. In addition, issues pertaining to eschatology, in most

someone claimed that creation never occurred. This is clearly outside of the bounds of inerrancy, even though it is the result of a so-called exegetical conclusion. Likewise, the Licona controversy is not merely a debate over a particular interpretation of Matt 27:51–53 because unlike the Genesis cases, Licona is not merely questioning the genre of the text and the relevant details surrounding the resurrection of the saints. Instead, he is questioning whether or not the event occurred, even though the historical narrative presents it as a real time-space historical event.⁵⁷ For that reason, the Licona controversy is not like debating old and young earth; instead, it is like debating creation and no creation.

Second, underlying Blomberg’s assessment over the proper relationship between authorial intention and the text is an underlying view of truth (even though he claims to affirm a correspondence theory of truth). Namely, he seems to deny a correspondence theory favoring an intentionalist theory of truth. Blomberg proceeds to discuss Article XIII of the CSBI statement. Throughout his assessment, Blomberg claims, “The standard of truth in a parable is the spiritual point or the point that its author intends to make.”⁵⁸ One should note by way of historical perspective, the CSBI unquestionably affirms a correspondence theory of truth. In the official commentary, Sproul writes:

By biblical standards of truth and error is meant the view used both in the Bible and in everyday life, viz., a correspondence view of truth. This part of the article is directed towards those who would redefine truth to relate merely to redemptive intent, the purely personal or the like, rather than to mean that which correspond with reality. For example, when Jesus affirmed that Jonah was in ‘the belly of the great fish’ this statement is true, not simply because of the redemptive significance of the story of Jonah has, but also because it is literally and historically true. The same may be said of the New Testament assertions about Adam, Moses, David, and other Old Testament persons as well as about Old Testament events.⁵⁹

That being said, the CSBI view is a correspondence view of truth, not an intentionalist theory.

Many present-day evangelicals are falling prey to the argument that claims, “Truth is found in intentions, not necessarily in affirmations.” That is, a statement is true if the author intends for it to be true, and a statement is false if he does not intend for it to be true. However, there are some underlying flaws in this approach. First, advocates of an intentionalist theory of truth still believe in a correspondence view of truth, namely, they believe their view of truth actually corresponds with reality.

cases (full-preterism excluded), are not debates over inerrancy but hermeneutics. For example, John MacArthur affirms a pre-tribulation rapture and pre-millennial return of Christ. R. Albert Mohler affirms a post-tribulation rapture and a pre-millennial return of Christ. In each case, both participants affirm biblical inerrancy; however, they differ over the timing of the rapture.

⁵⁷ See Charles L. Quarles, “Review of Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historical Approach*.” *JETS* 54 (Dec. 2011): 839–44.

⁵⁸ Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, 149.

⁵⁹ Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 43–44.

One does not claim “The intentionalist theory of truth is true” because he *intended* for it to be true, but because it corresponds to its actual referent (namely, reality). Second, many statements do not agree with the intention of the author, but they are clearly mistaken. For example, there are slips of the tongue and they are false. But if a statement is true simply because it was intended to be true, even if it was mistaken, then all such errors could be true.

In addition, it is false to claim that the various genres of Scripture present different “kinds” of truth. On the contrary, there is one kind of truth expressed by the various genres of Scripture. The point being, truth must be understood to correspond to *its* kind of reality. For example, no one believes that each parable taught by Jesus includes real referents because the nature of a parable is to use the story to prove a point about a salvific or spiritual truth. However, that truth corresponds to *its* reality. In a similar sense, it is false to claim that the Bible presents “relational” or “personal” truth. There are truths about relationships and about persons in Scripture, but truth itself is not relational or personal. It is propositional, that is, it makes a statement that affirms or denies something about reality.

Third, Blomberg seems to believe that either one incorporates authorial intent or they are left with a bare text, separated from the author’s true intention. The problem with this claim is it inherently slips an intentionalist theory of truth into his argument. But, if a correspondence view of truth is correct, then one can rightly affirm that the “text means what it says” and “the author intends what the text says.” Unlike normal matters of affair between human beings, God never errs in what He *intends* to communicate and in what He *actually* communicates. For that reason, due to the nature of inspiration there is not a false dichotomy between what the text *says* and what it *means*, because throughout the entire process by the superintendence of God, what the text says, God says; and what God says, the text says.

Fourth, another underlying phenomenon in Blomberg’s assessment is a desire to distinguish himself from those who naively assume that literary works exist as autonomous, aesthetic entities independent of all minds. If this is what Blomberg is challenging, then we are ready to join him! But, we are not willing to join him *if* by authorial intent he claims that the text can mean something different than what the affirmation claims by using the supposed author’s intention to change either the meaning or the historical factuality of the event and/or text. Clearly one recognizes with Hirsch that once a person abandons the author’s meaning of a text, then the meaning of a text can be altered. If authorial intention no longer stabilizes the text—then anyone can reread that text according to the emotional, psychological, historical—conditions, presuppositions, and biases. However, if the meaning of a text is not the creative invention of a reader, but the purposeful product of an author, then the meaning of a text cannot be readily altered. The author and the text hang or fall together; to abandon the author’s intention is to abandon the possibility of an objective meaning for any text.

But this stress on the importance of the author’s intention can be misapplied. For example, it is now often assumed, in the interest of hermeneutics, the scriptural writers did not intend to communicate history in their revelatory writings. The issue, however, is the exegete is bound to the text that expresses the mind of God and the writer’s purpose. He has no other access to this “purpose” except by way of the text taken in its literary and historical context.

During the Summit II meeting of the ICBI on hermeneutics, Carl F. H. Henry addressed an evangelical “use and abuse” of authorial intention. In order to capture the force of his argument, Henry must be quoted at length.⁶⁰ He writes:

Little did I realize that I was not the first to steal the Bible. The medieval church had kept the Book from the masses for whom it was intended and we evangelicals kept it from nurturing our own lives. But in recent years a different type of theft has emerged as some fellow evangelicals, along with non-evangelicals, wrest from the Bible segments they derogate as no longer the Word of God. *Some now even introduce authorial intention or cultural context of language as specious rationalizations for this crime against the Bible, much as some rapist might assure me that he is assaulting my wife for my own or for her good.* They misuse Scripture in order to champion as biblically true what in fact does violence to Scripture. It is one of the ironies of church history that even some professed evangelicals now speak concessively of divine revelation itself as culture-conditioned, and do so at the precise moment in Western history when the secular dogma of the cultural relativity of all truth and morality and religious beliefs need fervent challenging.⁶¹

Abuses of authorial intention are not a new challenge. In the 1980s Henry cautioned the ICBI to not use authorial intention in such a way so as to dismiss the clear propositional statements of Scripture. However, many individuals such as Blomberg and other neo-evangelical scholars have failed to heed Henry’s warning.

One can find many contemporary examples to illustrate Henry’s concern of an abuse of authorial intention in present-day scholarship. The first is an example from Licona’s dehistoricizing of the raising of the saints in Matthew’s gospel.⁶² Licona responds to his critics in a paper delivered to the Evangelical Philosophical Society, claiming, “I hope that it has become clear in this paper that my intent was not to dehistoricize a text Matthew intended as historical. If I had, that would be to deny the inerrancy of the text. Instead, what I have done is to question whether Matthew *intended* for the raised saints to be understood historically.”⁶³ This is precisely what Henry cautioned the ICBI to avoid as an abuse of authorial intention. For in doing so, interpreters such as Licona invalidate the clear meaning of Scripture and use “authorial intention” to assault the clear propositions of the Bible.

⁶⁰ One should also note that Radmacher and Preus claim, “This paper [Henry’s] was the message delivered at the closing session of the Summit II: Hermeneutics Conference. It is included here because it summarizes the issues of the conference and affirms the role of the Bible in today’s world.” Radmacher and Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible*, 915.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 917. Emphasis added.

⁶² See Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, “Defending Inerrancy: A Response to Methodological Unorthodoxy,” *Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2012): 61–87; Charles L. Quarles, “Review of Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historical Approach*,” *JETS* 54 (Dec. 2011): 839–44; Albert R. Mohler, “The Devil Is In the Details: Biblical Inerrancy and the Licona Controversy.” Accessed at: <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/09/14/the-devil-is-in-the-details-biblical-inerrancy-and-the-licona-controversy>.

⁶³ <http://www.risenjesus.com/images/stories/pdfs/2011%20eps%20saints%20paper.pdf>. emphasis added.

The second illustration is the way Kevin Vanhoozer argues for authorial intention. In Gregory Alan Thornbury's book, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism*, he discusses the influence Henry might have in this debate on authorial intention. In the section titled, "Henry Verses Vanhoozer," Thornbury remarks that one of Vanhoozer's primary complaints against Henry is that,

. . . authorial intent vis á vis inerrancy, implying that Henry had little appreciation of genre and discourse. Vanhoozer refers to Henry's discussion in volume 4 of *GRA* in which Henry openly worries that a narrow focus on authorial-intent interpretation can tempt commentators to sidestep the matter of the reliability and historicity of texts.⁶⁴

Thornbury openly chastises Vanhoozer's reading of Henry, claiming he is reading Henry in the "worst possible light."⁶⁵ Thornbury claims, ". . . if one makes the author's intent supreme, and if one says the author's intention was a genre other than historical and scientific accuracy, we have opened Pandora's box. Once you make this move, Henry warns, you can take any problematic or disputed text as a matter of genre confusion."⁶⁶ Thornbury continues to say:

As we will discuss later in this volume, this is precisely the interpretive move behind crucial abandonments of inerrancy in contemporary evangelicalism. So, for example, if you are uncomfortable saying that Genesis 1 literally reveals the way God created the universe, don't worry. Simply say that the author's purpose was literary, poetic, or allegorical, and your problem is solved. This was Carl Henry's fear, and he was right to be concerned—if not with Vanhoozer, then with others who do not possess the better angels of Kevin's theological nature.⁶⁷

Thornbury does not shy away from giving the names of those who use authorial intention to deny the inerrancy of the Bible. In the chapter of his book titled "Inerrancy Matters," Thornbury lists Peter Enns, John Schneider, Daniel Harlow, and Michael Licona as examples of individuals who have utilized this "authorial intention" argument, and have been fired from their posts over charges of violating the inerrancy of Scripture.⁶⁸ In any event, the point is that in his address at the ICBI, Henry almost prophetically foresaw many of the evangelical uses and abuses of authorial intention

⁶⁴ Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying The Wisdom And Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 106.

⁶⁵ The comment by Thornbury is, "As is the case with other figures in the critical reception of Henry, Vanhoozer reads Henry in the worst possible light, namely, that Henry claims no more than one way to read a text of Scripture. Vanhoozer's conclusion, aimed at Henry, states: 'It is Scripture that reveals God, not a set of detached propositions. Revealed truths are not abstract but canonically concrete. This is our evangelical birthright—truth in all of its canonical radiance, not a diluted mess of propositionalist pottage.' If you put the choices like that, who would settle for an allusion to Esau's ill-fated stew?" *Ibid.*, 106–07. Thornbury does not criticize Vanhoozer for raising questions against Henry's view; yet, he believes that Vanhoozer is reading Henry out of context.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

and the negative effects a poor use of authorial intention could have upon the doctrine of inerrancy and evangelicalism.

At this point, it is instructive to note, contrary to Blomberg's views, *how* Henry affirms that reason is operant for establishing the truth value of any text, ensuring the author's intention corresponds with the grammatical meaning of the sentence. Henry's theological method and hermeneutic opposes views such as Blomberg's and Licona's, that attempt to use a supposed "author's intent" to alter, deny or contradict the grammatical meaning of the Bible (specifically in cases pertaining to the historical-factuality of the text).⁶⁹ Henry also insists that an interpreter can know the author's intent only by using the grammatical-historical method of interpretation, and that the author's intention corresponds with the grammatical meaning of the text. He rejects all theories that bifurcate authorial intent and the grammatical meaning of the Bible (e.g., theories that look for meaning behind, in front of, or beneath the text). In other words, Henry (like classic evangelicalism and the CSBI) believes interpreters must uphold the motto made famous by Walter Kaiser: "Keep your finger *on* the text!"

Fourth Level: Models of Biblical Authority and Inerrancy

At a fourth level, Blomberg rightly notes there are two methods of affirming the inerrancy of Scripture. One being an inductive method and the other deductive. He claims:

The *inductive approach* begins with the phenomena of the Bible itself, defines what would count as an error, analyzes Scripture carefully from beginning to end, and determines that nothing has been discovered that would qualify as errant. The *deductive approach* begins with the conviction that God is the author of Scripture, proceeds to the premise that by definition God cannot err, and therefore concludes that God's Word must be without error. . . . Whether following evidentialism or presuppositionalism, this deductive approach ultimately views inerrancy as a corollary of inspiration, not as something to be demonstrated from the texts of Scripture itself. If the Bible is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), and God cannot err, then the Bible must be inerrant.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Henry would oppose the notion that in order to properly understand a text, one must "read it the way they would have read it." For, according to Henry, either the original readers would have read it according to its historical, logical, grammatical meaning, or they would have not. If they do not read it according to its historical, logical, and grammatical meaning, Henry would claim they are abusing authorial intent. For Henry, there are two types of reader response. Either the present-day reader can change the meaning of the text or the present-day reader can change the meaning of the text by claiming the original author did not "intend" his audience to read it that way. However, according to Henry, there is only one type of logic, and due to the image of God in humanity, there is only one kind of mind. In brief, as was seen in the quote by Henry at the ICBI, any attempt by interpreters of Scripture to use "authorial intention" to override the grammatical aspects of the text, is considered a misguided approach and abusive to the Bible as the Word of God.

⁷⁰ Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, 121, 123.

While Blomberg does not come right out and say, "I hold to the inductive approach," one can gather from the tone and overall trajectory of his writings, he follows an inductive approach to inerrancy. In our book *Defending Inerrancy*, Geisler and I respond to the claim, "Inerrancy Is Derived Purely Deductively From Other Teachings and Is not Based in an Inductive Study of Scripture."⁷¹ The reason we include this objection is because many Old and New Testament scholars and those following the Biblical Theology movement, claim that we must keep our view of inerrancy accountable to the text of Scripture. I adamantly agree! Evangelicalism has always been marked by a clear commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture to address all matters pertaining to faith and practice; including the way someone approaches the very text of Scripture itself.⁷²

Like Geisler and I present in *Defending Inerrancy*, Blomberg's claim hinges upon two key premises: First, the doctrine of inerrancy is not explicitly taught in the Bible. Second, deduction is not an appropriate method to understand the inerrancy of Scripture. Investigating the first point, it is apparent that neither is the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly taught in the Bible. But it is taught implicitly and logically, as is the inerrancy of the Bible. Both premises from which inerrancy is derived are necessary and logical conclusions taught in the Bible. For example, the Bible teaches that (1) it is the Word of God (John 10:35; 2 Tim 3:16), and (2) the Word of God cannot err (John 17:17; Heb 6:18). Hence, it follows logically that (3) the Bible cannot err.

The same is true with other key doctrines of the Christian faith, including: (1) the Trinity; (2) Jesus is one person; (3) Jesus is fully God; (3) Jesus is fully human. Scripture contains all of the pieces in order to affirm each of these doctrines, however, the Bible nowhere explicitly teaches the hypostatic union or the Trinity. Nonetheless, both doctrines are biblically based doctrines, being contained implicitly in the Scriptures. For example, the Bible teaches (1) there is one God (Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:4), and (2) there are three distinct persons who are God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:16; 28:18–20; 2 Cor 13:14). Hence, the only logical conclusion is that (3) there are three distinct persons in one and only one God (namely, the Trinity). The point being, a doctrine should not be rejected because it is taught in the Bible only implicitly and logically, not explicitly.

As it pertains to claims made by Blomberg concerning the relationship between induction and deduction, several points can be made. First of all, no one operates according to an either purely inductive or deductive method. Throughout one's daily life each individual uses induction and deduction in order to function in the space-time world. Second, it is false to claim inerrancy does not have a strong inductive basis in Scripture. For both premises from which the conclusion is derived, are the result of a complete (perfect) induction from Scripture: (1) God cannot err; (2) the Bible is the Word of God. Both of these truths result from a complete study of all the Scriptures. This is called a "perfect induction" in logic since it involves an exhaustive study of the data in limited areas. And perfect induction can come to knowledge that is certain. For example, one can be certain about the truth of the statement, "All the

⁷¹ Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 322–23.

⁷² Note that Blomberg does not agree with classic evangelicalism at this point. In his book, Blomberg argues against the sufficiency of Scripture. In particular, as it pertains to secular verses biblical counseling. Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, 77–78.

coins in my pocket are pennies.” Likewise, the Bible is a larger but also finite (limited) area, in which one can study exhaustively any given doctrine and come to a certain conclusion. That being the case, both premises on which inerrancy is based are completely inductive, and we can be certain about them.

Third, if Blomberg and others are willing to object to the deductive approach, then they must deny the laws of thought, which is both self-defeating, or they must affirm the laws of logic and agree with the only logical conclusion that can be drawn from premises (1) and (2) above is (3) the Bible cannot err. So the conclusion is a logically necessary inference from two certain premises. In order to deny this conclusion, someone must deny one or more of the premises. But it is simply untrue to argue that the only two premises from which we derive inerrancy are completely inductively based.

Fourth, a growing concern with the Biblical Theology movement is its repudiation of systematic theology. Many of these theologians believe exegesis is the begin-all and end-all of theological study. They think that what cannot be derived from “pure exegesis” is not a proper conclusion derived from Scripture. Besides being philosophically naïve, this view is badly mistaken and self-defeating. If applied to nature, it would involve the repudiation of all science, which attempts to systematically categorize and draw logical inferences from the data of nature. This is also what systematic theology tries to do with the data derived from the exegesis of Scripture. It is also self-defeating because exegesis requires the use of logical thinking and necessary inferences. These sometimes include both inductive and deductive reasoning.

Fifth, to deny that logically necessary conclusions are derived exegetically (inductively) from Scripture and their appropriate relationship to deductive reasoning, will lead to the denial of other orthodox doctrines. As has already been shown, the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ are derived from logically necessary deductions. So too is much of orthodox Christian theology. Thus, to deny the procedure by which evangelicals derive the inerrancy of Scripture is to deny the basis for many other orthodox doctrines.

Sixth, there is a strong use of logic and deductive reasoning in the Protestant and evangelical traditions. For example, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* speaks in chapter 1, sect. 6 of the “whole counsel of God . . . [is] either expressly set down in Scripture, or *by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.*” Hence, it is clear that the use of logic and deduction is not contrary to the Protestant principles of interpretation. In fact, since the *Westminster Confession* is typically considered the pinnacle of Protestant confessions, one could make the case that the use and acceptance of deduction is one of the key marks of Protestant biblical interpretation and systematic theology. Thus, in keeping with the laws of logic, namely the law of non-contradiction, the repudiation of deduction and logical thinking excludes individuals such as Blomberg from *fully* adhering to this great interpretive tradition (even though much of his work is in complete agreement with the Protestant principles of biblical interpretation).

3. Blomberg's Book Serves as a Catalyst to Promote the Resurgence of Neo-Evangelical Theology (a.k.a., Limited Inerrancy)

Given what has already been noted in this article, we are faced with some important questions: Where have we seen theological views of biblical authority and evangelical identity similar to Blomberg's presented in the history of evangelicalism? Do the individuals who endorsed the book (Scot McKnight at Northern Seminary; Darrell Bock at Dallas Theological Seminary; Paul Copan at Palm Beach Atlantic University; Craig Keener at Asbury Theological Seminary; and Leith Anderson, current president of the National Association of Evangelicals) each agree with Blomberg's conclusions regarding the nature of biblical inerrancy and evangelical identity? Last but not least, is there a division taking place in the broader evangelical community over biblical inerrancy and evangelical identity?

One does not have to look back very far in evangelical history to find views of biblical authority and evangelical identity similar to Blomberg's, namely, Fuller Theological Seminary. According to Harold Lindsell, Charles Fuller founded Fuller Seminary requiring that inerrancy be in their doctrinal statement.⁷³ Lindsell was the first dean, and with Wilbur Smith, Everett F. Harrison, and Carl Henry, they formed the first faculty. The doctrinal statement of Scripture read: "The books which form the canon of the Old and New Testament as originally given are plenary inspired and free from all error in the whole and in the part. These books constitute the written Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice." Such a statement meant that the Bible is free from errors in matters of fact, science, history, and chronology, as well as in matters having to do with salvation.

In *Reforming Fundamentalism*, George M. Marsden tracks "The Crisis and Turning" at Fuller.⁷⁴ In a letter to Billy Graham, Wilbur Smith wrote, "So you see, as everyone realizes, our Seminary is split straight down the middle on the most important single question [inerrancy], apart from the Deity of Christ, that can be considered."⁷⁵ Marsden goes on to demonstrate Fuller Seminary split over the issue of biblical inerrancy and the influence of Dan Fuller, Charles Fuller's son. Dan Fuller, after being trained in some of the finest European schools, returned to Fuller Seminary. In a letter to his father, Marsden records that Dan conceded to the following points claiming evangelicals are merely playing lip service to their openness to the latest archaeological findings if they affirm that the Bible is without error in the whole and in part.⁷⁶ Marsden then goes on to note:

Some of the chronologies in Scripture, Fuller [Dan] explained to his parents were simply wrong, and, although the errors were innocent bookkeeping errors, it was an apologetic disaster to act as though such errors in details did not exist.

⁷³ Lindsell, *The Battle For The Bible*, 106–21.

⁷⁴ George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 197–219).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

It made a sham of evangelical claims to take history seriously on vitally important matters as the fact of the Resurrection. *So the Fuller creed should be revised to say that the infallibility had to do with its statements on faith and practice, not its precise historical detail.* ‘How tragic,’ he observed, ‘that we went overboard so on this in order to make it too hot for Vassady.’ He also knew, as a matter of fact, that the current creed made it too hot for Jewett as well, who had resorted to letting Carnell teach the parts of his systematics courses that deal with the doctrine of Scripture. As for Dan, he was anticipating trying out his views on his seminary colleagues to ‘see whether the faculty can blow holes in it.’⁷⁷

As time progressed, individuals at Fuller started to deny the historicity of Adam and Eve, the historical factuality of numerous Old Testament events, and called for a revision of their doctrinal statement to reflect their new theological concessions. Faculty such as George Ladd knew that by questioning inerrancy it could cost him his job.⁷⁸ The faculty also started to question the various methods of inerrancy: deductive vs. inductive. Many were conceding to the argument that inerrancy is a modernist convention arising from Scottish Common Sense Realism. Eventually, these concessions lead up to what was known as “Black Saturday,” where the seminary faculty split over the issue of biblical inerrancy and evangelical identity.

As is probably already apparent, Blomberg’s book and his vision of evangelicalism, is much closer to Dan Fuller’s moderate and neo-evangelical wing at Fuller Theological Seminary than that of ICBI. Like the faculty at Fuller, Blomberg is committed to a version of inerrancy (limited inerrancy). Blomberg’s model of biblical authority tries to take the phenomena of Scripture seriously, yet it does not want to claim too much. He does not believe that historical inaccuracies about the historicity of Job and the creation of Adam matter to the overall storyline and metanarrative of Scripture. In addition, like the neo-evangelical faculty at Fuller, he believes that much of the modern inerrancy movement springs from Common Sense Realism. Much like Dan Fuller, Blomberg does not want to see his fellow evangelicals dismissed or fired over their views of biblical inerrancy. Last but not least, like Fuller, Blomberg does not believe that an affirmation of the total truthfulness and inerrancy (unlimited) of Scripture is required for evangelical *consistency* or *identity*. He believes that evangelicals can give up non-essential historical details, just so long as the essential historical details are true.⁷⁹

Blomberg’s views have much more in common with Fuller Seminary’s neo-evangelicalism (limited inerrancy) than the classic evangelical views represented by

⁷⁷ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 213.

⁷⁹ Blomberg writes, “I may be convinced that there are good reasons for seeing a certain segment as historical, but I must distinguish between the more essential and more peripheral parts when I assess how significant someone’s doubts about the segments are. As we have seen, almost nothing is at stake if Job never existed, whereas everything is at stake if Jesus never lived.” Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe The Bible?*, 223. Also see the list of historical details Blomberg is willing to give up or hold mediating views on page 177.

the ICBI (unlimited inerrancy). The differences between classic evangelicalism (unlimited inerrancy) and neo-evangelicalism (limited inerrancy) can be seen in the following chart.

Classic Evangelical View of Unlimited Inerrancy	Neo-Evangelical View of Limited Inerrancy
True in both whole and parts	Truth in the whole but not in the parts
True spiritually and scientifically	True spiritually but not always scientifically or historically
True in what it intends and affirms	True in what it intends, not in all it affirms
Truth is found in correspondence	Truth is found in intention
Consistent use of correspondence	Inconsistent use of correspondence
Divine adaptation to finitude	Divine accommodation to error—especially when they utilize pagan literature and genre criticism
No errors of any kind in the Bible	No major or redemptive errors in the Bible
All mistakes are errors	Only intentional mistakes are errors

In response to the growing limited inerrancy and inerrancy of intention movements, a conglomeration of three hundred evangelical scholars met to form the *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy*. One of the primary reasons the ICBI met was to set theological boundaries and to proclaim that inerrancy matters and it provides axioms for doctrinal integrity necessary for the health of the church. Sproul writes:

It [ICBI] has as its purpose the defense and application of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as an essential element for the authority of Scripture and a necessity for the health of the church. It was created to counter the drift from this important doctrinal foundation by significant segments of evangelicalism and the outright denial of it by other church movements.⁸⁰

In the midst of the current controversy over the inerrancy of Scripture, present-day evangelicals must remember that the ICBI was formed in order to counter the drift away from unlimited inerrancy by neo-evangelicalism. It is becoming ever apparent that the conclusions reached by Blomberg in his book *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* are nothing new to the scene of evangelical theology. In fact, at the most important points his arguments resemble the same ones advocated by the neo-evangelicalism of Fuller Seminary. While individuals such as Bock, Copan, Keener and so forth claim to be committed to the ICBI unlimited inerrancy, they are clearly endorsing a book committed to limited inerrancy. Moreover, especially in the publications of

⁸⁰ Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 2.

Bock and Keener, it is apparent they are committed to the same methodology and conclusions of neo-evangelical theologians and limited inerrancy.⁸¹

Much like the faculty of Fuller, it seems like there are a growing number of scholars willing to forego classic evangelicalism and the doctrine of unlimited inerrancy, in order to promote a version of evangelicalism compatible with so-called new discoveries in scholarship. This trend clearly represents a split in the midst of evangelicalism over the nature of biblical *authority* and evangelical *identity*. Much like the nation of Israel, evangelical scholars and institutions quickly forget their history and for that reason, each generation is faced with their own *Battle For the Bible*. Let us hope and pray that this current debate over the nature of biblical inerrancy will not lead evangelicalism into its own “Babylonian captivity of the church,” where evangelicals bend their knee to “scholarship” and desire passionately a “seat at the table.”

Conclusion

In the final analysis, the last question to be answered is: Why is an evaluation of this nature and tone of Blomberg’s book necessary? On the one hand, it is necessary because the issue of inerrancy is never a settled issue and it is never going to go away. Modernity presents the watching world a spectrum of issues pertaining to epistemology, authority, and controlling axioms. Evangelicals will either present a coherent affirmation of divine inerrancy or they will not. Unless evangelicals mandate that inerrancy provide a sure and stable ontological and epistemological place to stand, evangelicalism as a movement will inevitably suffer the consequences that are part-and-parcel with the modern world—namely, the breakdown of revelation and the crisis of truth. The inevitable result will be the compromise of any sure Word from God.

On the other hand, the inerrancy debate is about truth and confessional identity. Should present-day evangelicals fail to heed the warnings about the necessity of affirming the total truthfulness and integrity of Scripture, then evangelicalism as a unified theological movement will inevitably face theological compromise, if not complete apostasy and sociological concession to philosophies adverse to the nature of God and anti-Logos dogmas. Sadly, much of what qualifies as “scholarship” within ETS reflects this trend.

Last but not least, the battle for the Bible is a debate on the nature of religious authority. Is Scripture both an authoritative and totally true source of religious knowledge revealing the mind of God in matters pertaining to history, salvation, doctrine, practice, and able to bind the conscience? In many respects, present-day evangelicals answer this question claiming, either: “No, Scripture does not contain that type of truthfulness or authority,” or they undermine sacred Writ as a controlling axiom by relegating and relativizing it to pagan mythology and mitigating forms of hermeneutical nihilism. In effect, Jewish and/or Pagan mythology and hermeneutical practices become the authoritative axioms for knowledge and biblical exposition. In other words, while these so-called “evangelicals” repudiate inerrancy as a modernist

⁸¹ See Norman L. Geisler and F. David Farnell, *The Jesus Quest: The Danger From Within* (Maitland: Xulon, 2014); Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 193–214.

paradigm, they too, by their own hermeneutical practices and theological concessions, reveal they are unable to escape the consequences of modernity. This is seen best in the way they synthesize the Scriptures with critical theories of knowledge and precarious forms of biblical interpretation.

Yet at the end of the day and with eternity in view, just like the faithful forefathers in the faith, let classic evangelicals always remember that just as death was unable to keep the Word of God made flesh in the grave, the crisis of revelation and truth presented by modernity and neo-evangelicalism cannot keep the Word of God made propositional bound to mediating epistemological and hermeneutical axioms or so-called “evangelical” synthesizes. May the Word of God stand forever!