

On the Inerrancy of Scripture

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You do err, knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.

Matthew 22:29

I. Introduction

In many of the recent writings of Scripture scholars there appears to be a certain reluctance to discuss the nature of the inspiration of Scripture and its relation to the interpretation of Scripture. For example, the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, denies that it intends to consider the theology of inspiration.

The Commission does not aim to adopt a position on all the questions which arise with respect to the Bible—such as, for example, the theology of inspiration. What it has in mind is to examine all the methods likely to contribute effectively to the task of making more available the riches contained in the biblical texts.¹

But in order for the Biblical Commission to achieve its stated goal, it is necessary for it to take some position regarding the nature of inspiration and its effects on Scripture, if only implicitly, even if this is contrary to the Commission's intentions. For example, the document certainly presupposes that the human authors of Scripture were not mere scribes, and that they contributed something of their own to the text of Scripture. The document criticizes fundamentalism in its interpretation of Scripture:

As regards relationships with God, fundamentalism seeks to escape any closeness of the divine and the human. It refuses to admit that the inspired Word of God has been expressed in human language and that this Word has been expressed, under divine inspiration, by human authors possessed of limited capacities and resources. For this reason, it tends to treat the biblical text as if it had been dictated word for word by the Spirit.²

If the Commission wished to be true to its intention to make no statement regarding the nature of inspiration, then it should not make this criticism, since it accuses the fundamentalists of suggesting, whether implicitly or explicitly, that inspiration is a divine act of dictation to a human scribe. Thus the Commission by this passage makes it clear that it holds a position contrary to the position allegedly held by the fundamentalists concerning the nature of inspiration.

In making this criticism, the Commission rightly supposes that it is necessary to consider the effect of inspiration on the human author in order to consider the interpretation of Scripture. For example, if it were true that Scripture was dictated by the Holy Spirit in the sense suggested, then the words of the Gospel, "I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first..."³ would acquire a very strange meaning. One would be forced to conclude that God must investigate in order to speak.

Examples such as this reveal both that the Commission is right to reject this kind of interpretation, and that it is necessary to consider the influence of inspiration on the human author, at least to some degree, if one wishes to interpret Scripture correctly. If one does not consider this influence, one will not be able to consider Scripture as the effect of man and God conjointly, since the causality of man and of God are joined in the act of inspiration. Thus, one who does not consider this influence will understand Scripture as though it were from God or from man, but not from both. Fundamentalism as characterized by the Pontifical Biblical Commission tends to consider Scripture as from God, but not from man, while much of modern Scripture scholarship tends to consider Scripture as from man, but not from God, because it tends not to consider God's

¹ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, trans. J. Kilgallen and B. Byrne (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 32-33.

² *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 71.

³ Luke 1:3. Quotations from Scripture found in this work have been taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

influence on man.⁴ It is necessary to counter this tendency by the consideration of the science of interpretation insofar as it is in some respects subordinate to the doctrine of inspiration. Thus it will be possible to avoid the opposite extremes mentioned above and to understand Scripture as written by men inspired by God.

The purpose of this work is to derive one of the principal rules of the interpretation of Scripture from the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, and to defend and to explain this rule. This rule can be taken from St. Augustine, whom Pope Leo XIII says “was so marvelously acute in penetrating the sense of God’s Word and so fertile in the use that he made of it for the promotion of the Catholic truth...”⁵

St. Augustine offers many examples of rules for the interpretation of Scripture. Several of his rules are derived from an understanding of inspiration. St. Augustine presents his first rule:

Of all, then, that has been said since we entered upon the discussion about things, this is the sum: that we should clearly understand that the fulfillment and end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed, and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves. For there is no need of a command that each man should love himself. The whole temporal dispensation for our salvation, therefore, was framed by the providence of God that we might know this truth and act upon it...⁶

Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought.⁷

St. Augustine’s argument is that the ultimate end of the inspiration of Scripture, together with the whole temporal dispensation for salvation, is the twofold love of God and of neighbor. Thus it is necessary that Scripture be understood in such a way that it promotes this end. If Scripture, or some part of Scripture, did not promote this end, God would have used an unfitting means toward this goal, which would imply a lack in the divine understanding, since God would not use an unfitting means if he knew that it was unfitting.

A second general rule is that Scripture must be read according to the rule of faith:

Accordingly, if, when attention is given to the passage, it shall appear to be uncertain in what way it ought to be punctuated or pronounced, let the reader consult the rule of faith which he has gathered from the plainer passages of Scripture, and from the authority of the Church...⁸

Scripture, then, must be read in conformity with itself and with the teaching of the Church. Other rules such as this one are needed in addition to the rule regarding the love of God and neighbor as the end of Scripture, because this end is remote rather than proximate. A more proximate goal of Scripture is the communication of God’s mind and will. “And in reading it [Scripture], men seek nothing more than to find out the thought and will of those by whom it was written, and through these to find out the will of God, in accordance with which they believe these men to have

⁴ This tendency does not arise from the science of exegesis, but from extraneous sources. Molinism is one such source, because it tends to derogate from the authority of God’s providence over the human mind and will. See James Burtchaell’s book, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969). Other sources are rationalism and the simple fear of ridicule by those who do not believe in God’s authorship.

⁵ *Providentissimus Deus* (Boston, Mass.: Daughters of St. Paul, n.d.), 10.

⁶ *On Christian Doctrine*, I, 35, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, 2:532-533.

⁷ *On Christian Doctrine*, I, 36, in NPNF, 1st Series, 2:533.

⁸ *On Christian Doctrine*, III, 2, in NPNF, 1st Series, 2:556-557.

spoken.”⁹ Because Scripture has proximate goals in addition to its remote goal it follows that there are more proximate rules of interpretation, such as the rule that Scripture must be read in conformity with itself and with the teaching of the Church. The reason for this rule is that the Church and the plain passages of Scripture are both believed to communicate the mind and will of God, and his mind and will cannot be in opposition to themselves.

But even this goal is attained through an end still more proximate. One cannot use Scripture to come to know the will of God without an understanding of particular sentences of Scripture. Consequently, St. Augustine gives other rules, all of a lesser scope than the two rules presented above. For example, he writes in reference to commands,

If the sentence is one of command, either forbidding a crime or vice, or enjoining an act of prudence or benevolence, it is not figurative. If, however, it seems to enjoin a crime or a vice, or to forbid an act of prudence or benevolence, it is figurative.¹⁰

The rules of faith and of charity are universal rules for the interpretation of Scripture, while rules such as the last two are rules for the interpretation of certain passages. But even the rule of faith as formulated above is somewhat restricted. St. Augustine says that Scripture must not be understood to contradict itself or the teaching of the Church. But elsewhere St. Augustine suggests that the rule of faith must be understood in a broader manner.

Whatever they can really demonstrate to be true of physical nature we must show to be capable of reconciliation with our Scriptures; and whatever they assert in their treatises, which is contrary to these Scriptures of ours, that is to Catholic faith, we must either prove it as well as we can to be entirely false, or at all events we must, without the smallest hesitation, believe it to be so.¹¹

St. Augustine thus indicates that the rule of faith requires that the Scriptures not be interpreted in a manner contrary to the truth of physical science. This, together with the requirement that Scripture not contradict itself or the teaching of the Church, suggests that the rule of faith is to be understood to exclude any interpretation of Scripture which maintains that some statement of Scripture is false.¹² St. Augustine says clearly in another place,

And if in these books I meet anything which seems contrary to truth, I shall not hesitate to conclude either that the text is faulty, or that the translator has not expressed the meaning of the passage, or that I myself do not understand.¹³

The rule of faith broadly understood, then, is that no passage of Scripture is to be interpreted so as to make it assert something false. This rule is more universal than any of St. Augustine’s other rules, if they are taken precisely as rules of interpretation. It is evidently more universal than his rules governing whether a passage is to be understood figuratively or literally, and other such rules, since these rules govern only particular passages, while the rule of faith is a rule for the interpretation of Scripture as a whole, and for every sentence of Scripture.

The rule of charity alone seems to have an equal universality, because the whole of Scripture is ordered to the love of God and of neighbor. But in practice the rule of charity, taken as a rule of

⁹ *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 5, in NPNF, 1st Series, 2:536-537.

¹⁰ *On Christian Doctrine*, III, 16, in NPNF, 1st Series, 2:563.

¹¹ *De Gen. Ad Litt.*, I, 21; cited by Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, 24.

¹² One reason for this might be that all of Scripture is useful, while a lie is never useful. “Now every man who lies commits an injustice... Either then, injustice is sometimes useful (which is impossible), or a lie is never useful” (St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I, 36, in NPNF, 1st Series, 2:533). But “all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching...” (2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore Scripture cannot contain lies.

¹³ *Ep. Lxxxii*, 1; cited by Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, 27.

interpretation, does not have the same scope because it is very difficult or impossible to prove that a given interpretation is incapable of building up charity, except by showing that the given interpretation conflicts with the rule of faith. In theory it is possible to make an argument that a certain interpretation, even if true, is not the meaning of Scripture because it cannot build up the love of God and of neighbor. For example, someone could argue that Scripture must not assert that Judas was lost, even if this may be true, because it is not clear that believing this can build up charity. But a counter argument could be made: the knowledge of Judas' loss could lead to a greater care that one does not fall, and thus lead to a greater charity. If one orders one's love of self to the love of God, a greater love of self implies a greater love of God. Just as there can be a special love for those related to one's friends, on account of friendship, so there can be a special love of self as ordered to God, on account of friendship with God. Thus the knowledge of Judas' loss could strengthen one's friendship with God. In general, it does not seem to be possible to show that a given interpretation is contrary to the rule of charity unless the given interpretation encourages crime or vice. Such a case is a particular case falling under the rule of faith, which also excludes interpretations contrary to the truth of moral life. St. Augustine implicitly supports this position:

Thus, when one shall say, "He [Moses] meant as I do," and another, "Nay, but as I do," I suppose that I am speaking more religiously when I say, "Why not rather as both, if both be true?" And if there be a third truth, or a fourth, and if any one seek any truth altogether different in those words, why may not he be believed to have seen all these, through whom one God hath tempered the Holy Scriptures to the senses of many, about to see therein things true but different?¹⁴

St. Augustine thus suggests that an interpretation can only be excluded in an absolute manner if it makes the Scripture false, while any true interpretation is a possible interpretation, unless the interpretation is impossible in virtue of the text and context of the passage. This supports the claim made above, that the rule of charity, at least in most cases, is only intended to exclude falsehoods against the truth of moral life. Thus the rule of charity is in practice less universal as a principle of interpretation than the rule of faith broadly understood, although the love of God and of neighbor is truly a universal end of Scripture and of all that it contains. The reason for this is that the rule of faith immediately concerns the proximate end of Scripture, which is communication, while the rule of charity bears on the more remote end.

The rule of faith, then, is the most universal rule for the interpretation of Scripture, and applies to every passage of Scripture. This rule guides the use of all other rules. For example, if a passage when taken literally seems to advocate a vice, St. Augustine's rule that such a passage must be taken figuratively cannot be applied if the figurative sense implies something false.¹⁵ One must rather reevaluate the passage for other possible literal senses, or examine the original for a possible mistranslation, or extend one's investigation in other directions. In other words, other rules of interpretation can have exceptions, while the rule of faith can have none. The rule of charity is also without exception, but it is more limited in scope as a rule of interpretation for the reasons given above.

The rule of faith broadly understood also determines the immediate purpose of the interpretation of Scripture. If this rule is correct, then the attaining of truth is the immediate goal of Scriptural interpretation. As soon as one has found a determinate assertion in Scripture, one has attained a determinate truth.¹⁶ If this rule were not correct, then to establish the meaning of Scripture would

¹⁴ *Confessions*, XII, 31, in NPNF, 1st Series, 1:188.

¹⁵ St. Augustine's example of something that must be taken figuratively, the eating of the body of Christ, might be such a case, since such eating sometimes figuratively expresses the destruction of one's enemies, as in Psalm 27:2 and in Micah 3:3. Thus this eating is to be understood literally, but as referring to the sacramental eating of the body of Christ, rather than to cannibalism.

¹⁶ It does not follow that as soon as one understands a single sentence, one has attained a truth, however, because not all the sentences of Scripture are assertions.

not be sufficient to manifest any truth immediately, but it would be necessary to take additional steps in order to reach the truth, making Scriptural interpretation only indirectly ordered to the knowledge of truth. This would be so even when some passage of Scripture asserts something true, because it would be necessary to prove that the passage is such a passage.

The purpose of this work is to defend the rule of faith broadly understood. In virtue of what has been stated above, this is a task of great importance in the interpretation of Scripture, because the rule applies to interpretation universally, and sets the end of interpretation as well. First the validity of the rule will be established by authority, that is, by Scripture, by tradition, and by the teaching of the Church, and then the rule will be defended and explained theologically, along with the consideration of possible modes of denying this rule and their consequences. Then objections both to the truth of the rule and to the usefulness of the rule will be considered, and finally the affirmation or denial of the rule will be considered in relation to theology as a whole.

II. The Rule of Faith Proven by Authority

A. Scripture

Scripture's freedom from error will now be proven by authority, and first from the authority of Scripture itself. The objection that this manner of argument is circular will be considered after the exposition of the argument itself. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament witness to Scripture's inerrancy in various ways. The Old Testament testifies explicitly to the truth of God's words: "God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?"¹⁷ In the context this refers to God's fidelity to his promises, but the statement regarding the truth of God's words is more universal. The same is true in the following text. "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him."¹⁸ As well as asserting the truth of God's word, the Old Testament makes the corresponding claim that no false statement is from God. "If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken."¹⁹ In this case the claim is clearly more universal than a claim concerning God's fidelity. No false statement whatsoever may be attributed to divine authority.

But these statements alone cannot be used to prove that there is no error in Scripture, because although it has been shown that the Old Testament asserts the truth of God's word, it has not yet been shown that Scripture is the word of God. This claim can be found in various places in Scripture, but most explicitly in the New Testament. For example, the divine authorship of Scripture is asserted directly, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...'"²⁰ The text quoted is from the Psalms and the Holy Spirit is named as the author. In the Old Testament David makes the same claim: "The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue."²¹ Not only texts immediately expressing God's own words are attributed to God, but also other texts of Scripture.

For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you?" Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire."²²

Similarly, the Apostle Peter attributes the prophecies of the Old Testament to the Holy Spirit: "Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas... For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it.'"²³ Thus it was the Holy Spirit who said this through David.

Once it is granted that Scripture is the word of God and that the word of God cannot be false, it follows that Scripture cannot be false. This cannot be understood to be true only in a general way which would allow for particular exceptions, because the text from Deuteronomy proves that this rule can be used to test whether a particular statement is from God. Thus, for example, if there were a particular mistake concerning history in some part of Scripture, the rule given in Deuteronomy

¹⁷ Numbers 23:19.

¹⁸ Proverbs 30:5.

¹⁹ Deuteronomy 18:22.

²⁰ Hebrews 3:7.

²¹ 2 Samuel 23:2.

²² Hebrews 1:5-7. The last text quoted by the passage is Psalm 104:4, and is a text addressed to God, not a text expressed as coming from God.

²³ Acts 1:16-20. Again, the text cited by the passage is from Psalm 109, and is expressed as a prayer to God, not as God's own words.

18:22 could be used to prove that the word was not a word of God and therefore not part of inspired Scripture.

The argument from the Old Testament depends upon the twofold truth that Scripture is the word of God and that the word of God is free from error. In the New Testament Christ testifies directly to the conclusion of this argument, removing the necessity of reasoning from two independent statements. To the accusation of blasphemy Jesus responds, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’—and the scripture cannot be annulled...”²⁴ When Christ says that Scripture cannot be annulled he intends to say that Scripture cannot be mistaken. If it were possible that those who were called gods were falsely so called, then Christ’s argument would fail. Thus Christ must be taken to be asserting that there is no error in Scripture. One might object to this argument in three ways. First, Christ’s statement is hypothetical. He says that if one thing is so, then another follows. The answer to this objection is that the question is only rhetorical. This is evident from the first question, “Is it not written in your law...” and from the first clause of the second question, “If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’...” Neither of these is really open to question. Similarly, there can be no question concerning the claim that Scripture cannot be annulled, that is, proven false.

The second objection that could be made is that Christ’s claim must be understood to imply a general property of Scripture, but cannot be understood to imply the truth of every particular assertion. But the answer to this is that just as the rule stated in Deuteronomy 18:22 regards particular claims, so also Christ’s rule stated in John 10:35 regards particular claims. If it did not regard each particular assertion, it would not follow that the assertion concerning the gods was true. Thus the Jews could conclude that those men were falsely called gods, and Christ falsely called the Son of God, and thus Christ’s argument would fail. But we cannot say that Christ was mistaken in his reasoning, and so it is necessary to say that his statement is a universal one, embracing every particular assertion of Scripture.

Third, one might say that the ‘scripture’ (*graphe*) that cannot be annulled is not the Old Testament in general, but that it refers to the particular text cited. But this is not reasonable, because Christ would not be understood to be making an argument that the text cited cannot be false, but a mere assertion, while if ‘scripture’ is taken universally there is an intelligible argument. Nor can it be said that the reason that this text cannot be annulled is that it is expressed in the form of God’s own words. For if scripture in general could be false, there could be statements falsely attributed to God, and the statement, “I said, ‘you are gods,’” could be one such statement. One must take ‘scripture’ to be Scripture in general, therefore, if one wishes to understand Christ’s argument as a valid argument.

Similarly, Christ speaks against the idea that he wishes to abolish the law: “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.”²⁵ This has been used to argue that there are false statements in Scripture:

Then Peter: “As to the mixture of truth with falsehood, I remember that on one occasion He, finding fault with the Sadducees, said, ‘Wherefore ye do err, not knowing the true things of the Scriptures; and on this account ye are ignorant of the power of God.’²⁶ But if He cast up to them that they knew not the true things of the Scriptures, it is manifest that there are false things in them....

And His saying, ‘The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but one jot or one tittle shall not pass from the law,’ intimated that the things which pass away before the heaven and the earth do not belong to the law in reality.²⁷

²⁴ John 10:34-35.

²⁵ Matthew 5:18.

²⁶ Cf. Matthew 22:29.

²⁷ *The Clementine Homilies*, III, 50-51, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 8:247-248.

There are some things in the law that seem to have passed from the law. Thus it seems to follow that these things were not part of the law. Therefore there are some things in the written law that do not pertain to God's law, whether false statements or commands which should not be obeyed. But if one holds that everything in the written law does pertain to God's law, which appears to be the meaning of Christ's claim, then by the same argument the opposite conclusion follows. In the written law there cannot be any false statements or commands that were not to be obeyed when they were given, since these things would have to be rejected and thus would pass from the law.

In the words of Christ given above there is explicit testimony to Scripture's inerrancy. In other places in the New Testament there are implicit testimonies concerning this matter. The gravity of the question is revealed in the following example from a letter of St. Peter.

So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and the unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.²⁸

St. Peter suggests that the ignorant and the unstable misinterpret Scripture in such a way that it leads them to destruction. But since he says that St. Paul wrote according to the wisdom given to him, it seems to follow that St. Paul wrote something true, but the ignorant misinterpreted it to mean what is in fact false. If this is extended to Scripture as a whole, as St. Peter suggests, then it is necessary to say that the authors of Scripture spoke the truth, according to the wisdom given to them, and that any other understanding of Scripture is a misunderstanding. This manifests the importance of the issue under consideration, since such a misunderstanding of Scripture leads to destruction. Thus St. Peter continues, "You therefore, beloved, since you are forewarned, beware that you are not carried away with the error of the lawless and lose your own stability."²⁹

As in the case of the words of Christ, one might object that the word 'scriptures' (*graphas*) does not necessarily mean Sacred Scripture. This objection might seem more likely in this case, because at that time the New Testament, at least as a whole, had not been written, collected, and recognized as Sacred Scripture.³⁰ But the precise sense of the term does not matter, since St. Peter is speaking of Sacred Scripture, and Sacred Scripture alone, even if he does not speak of it under the formal account of Sacred Scripture. It is not true of writing in general that twisting the meaning due to ignorance leads to destruction, but this consequence is a special property of Sacred Scripture.

Other arguments from Scripture could be made, but the ones that have been presented above, and the testimony of Christ in particular, are sufficient to conclude reasonably that Scripture testifies to its freedom from error.³¹ Now, as was mentioned above, someone might object to this manner of argument. No authority can be used to establish its own authority. The position that there are false statements in Scripture cannot be proven false by Scripture, because any suggested proof might itself contain false statements.

The answer to this objection is that no authority can be used to establish its own authority, if its authority is entirely in question. But if authority is already established in some way, the authority can be used to establish its precise limits. For example, if one takes a teacher of mathematics as an authority in mathematics, one will trust the teacher if he says that he knows the solution of some

²⁸ 2 Peter 3:15-16.

²⁹ 2 Peter 3:17.

³⁰ Later it will be noted that even by the time of the writing of the letters of St. Paul, the Gospels, or at least portions of the Gospels, were already recognized as Sacred Scripture, equal in authority to the Old Testament.

³¹ Other particular texts that could be used to support the position in various ways include Psalm 12:6, Mark 12:24, Luke 16:17 and 24:44-45, 2 Timothy 3:16, and Revelation 22:6 and 22:19-19. It is also possible to argue more generally from the attitudes and ways of speaking used by the authors of Scripture in relation to other works of Scripture. This argument is powerfully made by Benjamin B. Warfield in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948).

differential equation but not of another. Thus if one does not accept the authority of Scripture to any degree, as one who is neither Christian nor Jew, the above arguments establish nothing. But the purpose of this work is not to persuade unbelievers to embrace the faith, but to offer a true understanding of Scripture to Catholics. Now, all Catholics accept Scripture as an authority, and thus a Catholic can use the authority of Scripture in order to establish its limits in a more precise manner.

But one could still raise an objection. Whenever an authority is not an absolute authority, it is possible for the authority to state something false. Thus the mathematician spoken of above might say that he knows something of which he happens to be ignorant, although in general he is to be trusted. But according to the position being considered, Scripture is not an absolute authority. Thus it remains possible that the statements in Scripture which extend its authority to all matters are false statements, and so it follows that this argument cannot be used to establish the inerrancy of Scripture in all matters.

In part it is necessary to concede the above objection at this point.³² If an authority is not taken as an absolute authority, then it cannot be used to establish anything with absolute necessity. One nonetheless employs arguments from authority, although they do not conclude with necessity, but only with probability. Thus it is reasonable to use the above arguments with someone who does not take Scripture as an absolute authority, if he holds that Scripture is an authority in any way.

B. Tradition

I. JEWISH TRADITION

Now that the authority of Scripture with respect to its inerrancy has been considered, it is necessary to consider the Church's tradition concerning the question, beginning with Jewish tradition, because the truth possessed by the Jews was handed down to the Church and perfected by Christ. Now, one might object on Scriptural grounds to the use of Jewish tradition as an authority. It can be seen from the teaching of Christ that the traditions of the Jews added many errors to the Law. Christ addresses the Pharisees,

And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, "Honor your father and your mother," and, "Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die." But you say that whoever tells father or mother, "Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God," then that person need not honor the father.³³

This accusation reveals that the Jewish tradition sometimes went so far as to contradict divine law. Thus it seems that the traditions of the Jews do not have authority.

It is possible to answer this objection by distinguishing between various kinds of Jewish tradition, but this is not necessary for the purpose of this work. Jewish tradition is here considered only insofar as it is a part of the Church's tradition. Thus Jewish tradition is considered to have authority only insofar as it is confirmed and received by the later tradition of the Church. But then it might seem that the Jewish tradition adds nothing to the tradition of the Church, and so it is not necessary to discuss it. But even if the traditions passed down both by the Jews and by the Church do not have greater authority than those passed down by the Church alone, they have a more

³² When the various modes in which inerrancy can be denied are considered, it will be shown that if one holds that Scripture asserts something false with respect to such matters, then one must also hold that Scripture has no authority whatsoever in theology. But every Catholic holds that Scripture has authority in theology. With the addition of this consideration the argument from the authority of Scripture concludes of necessity.

³³ Matthew 15:3-5.

fundamental status in the faith. The reason for this is that the teaching of Christ builds upon and perfects the revelation given to the Jews. For example, the teaching concerning the unity of God is common to Jews and Christians, while Christians alone teach the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. Now, both he who denies the Trinity of persons and he who denies the unity of God are mistaken, but the latter makes a mistake with respect to something more fundamental. Thus, if it can be shown that the inerrancy of Scripture is contained in both Jewish and Christian tradition, it will follow that this matter is most fundamental to the faith.

That this doctrine is contained in the tradition of the Jews can be shown from Scripture. In the first place, the Jews receive the Old Testament as inspired by God, and the Old Testament teaches this doctrine, as was shown above. Similarly, the arguments given above from the New Testament show that the Jews in fact accepted this doctrine. When Christ says, “If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’—and the scripture cannot be annulled—,”³⁴ he makes it manifest that the Jews accept this teaching. Even if one should deny that Christ accepted it himself, by saying that this is only a conditional argument, it would remain evident that the reason that Christ gives this argument is that the antecedent is accepted without question by the Jews.³⁵ Again, the fact that the Jews held this doctrine can be seen from the way Scripture is used as an authority in argument. For example, when the Pharisees object to Christ’s teaching concerning divorce, “Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorce, and to put away?”³⁶ it does not seem that they admit the possibility that Moses was wrong. At times it even seems that some of the Jews, taking an extreme position, give Scripture a negative as well as a positive authority. If something is not contained in Scripture, it is judged to be false. This seems to be the reason for the Sadducees’ denial of the resurrection, and is also implicit in the Jews’ argument against Nicodemus: “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”³⁷

If one investigates the Jewish testimony regarding their tradition, one discovers, as was suggested above, that some of the Jews go far beyond the doctrine of inerrancy. Some seem to maintain that Scripture is perfect in every respect, and reject all human limitations of the sort posited by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in the quotation at the beginning of this work.

This can be clearly seen in the Jewish commentary on Genesis, *Genesis Rabbah*. The root of its teaching can be seen in its doctrine concerning the creation of the Torah:

Six things came before the creation of the world, some created, some at least considered as candidates for creation.

The Torah and the throne of glory were created [before the creation of the world].

The Torah, as it is written, “The Lord made me as the beginning of his way, prior to his works of old” (Prov. 8:22).³⁸

So the Torah, according to this teaching, was created before the beginning of the world. The meaning of this is not that it preceded the world in intention alone, as is stated about Israel, “Intention concerning the creation of Israel came before all else.”³⁹ Rather, the claim is that the Torah existed as an actual work preceding the world in time. This can also be seen in the statement, “Along these same lines, if the Holy One, blessed be he, had not foreseen that, after twenty-six generations, the Israelites would be destined to accept the Torah, he would never have written in it, ‘Command the children of Israel.’”⁴⁰ God wrote the Torah before the creation of the world. It follows from this position that God alone is the author of the Torah, and man played no part in its

³⁴ John 10:35.

³⁵ It should be noted, however, that one who takes this position leaves Christ open to the charge of a needless deception.

³⁶ Matthew 19:7.

³⁷ John 7:52.

³⁸ *Genesis Rabbah*, trans. Jacob Neusner (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1985), I.IV.1.A-C.

³⁹ *Genesis Rabbah*, I.IV.2.A.

⁴⁰ *Genesis Rabbah*, I.IV.2.E.

authorship. This position does not deny that Moses was involved in giving the Torah to Israel, but it does deny that he was involved as an author.

R. Samuel bar Nahman in the name of R. Jonathan: “When Moses was writing out the Torah, he wrote up the work of each day [in sequence]. When he came to the verse, ‘And God said, *Let us make man...*’ (Gen. 1:26), he said, ‘Lord of the age, in saying this you give an opening to heretics.

“He said to him, ‘Write it anyhow, and if someone wants to err, let him err.’⁴¹

According to this, Moses either copied down the original of the Torah, or he wrote it out from God’s dictation. It is not surprising that Jews holding such a position would tend to deny the existence of human limitations in Sacred Scripture.

One element of this denial is the rejection of error. Thus the Rabbis prove that there is only one God:

R. Isaac commenced [discourse by citing the following verse]: “‘The beginning of your word is truth [and all your righteous ordinance endures forever]’ (Ps. 119:16).

Said R. Isaac [about the cited verse], “From the beginning of the creation of the world, ‘The beginning of your word was truth.’

“‘In the beginning God created’ (Gen. 1:1).

“‘And the Lord God is truth’ (Jer. 10:9).

“Therefore: ‘And all your righteous ordinance endures forever’ (Ps. 119:16).

“For as to every single decree which you lay down for your creatures, they accept that decree as righteous and receive it in good faith, so that no creature may differ, saying, ‘Two powers gave the Torah, two powers created the world.’

“[Why not?] Because here it is not written, ‘And gods spoke,’ but rather, ‘And God spoke’ (Ex. 20:1).

“‘In the beginning [gods] created’ is not written, but rather, ‘in the beginning [God] created’ [in the singular].”⁴²

The Rabbis cite verses showing that God and his word are truth in order to show that no one is permitted to reject his decrees as erroneous. The proof is completed with verses by which Scripture attests to the unity of God. It is not difficult to see that the Rabbis extend this teaching concerning the truth of God’s word to all matters whatsoever. For example, the Rabbis discuss the structure of the world:

R. Phineas in the name of R. Hoshayya: “Like the empty space that lies between the earth and the firmament is the empty space between the firmament and the upper water.

“[That is in line with the verse]: ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters’ (Gen. 1:6), that is to say, right in the middle, between [the water above and below].”⁴³

There is no suggestion that Scripture might be wrong about the distance between the firmament and the waters above and below it.⁴⁴

Genesis Rabbah, then, does maintain the complete freedom of Scripture from error. But it goes beyond this, as has been stated above. Its general position seems to be that Scripture is entirely intelligible in every respect, even if men cannot always understand it. For example, the Rabbis ask

⁴¹ *Genesis Rabbah*, VIII.VIII.1.A-B.

⁴² *Genesis Rabbah*, I.VII.1.A-H.

⁴³ *Genesis Rabbah*, IV.III.1.A-B.

⁴⁴ Nor do they recognize the possibility that Scripture may not intend to determine such a distance.

the question, “Why was the world created with [a word beginning with the letter] B?”⁴⁵ Various answers are proposed:

“Just as [in Hebrew] the letter B is closed [at the back and sides but] open in front, so you have no right to expound concerning what is above or below, before or afterward.”...

To tell you that there are two ages [this age and the age to come, for the letter B bears the numerical value of two]....

Because that is the letter that begins the word for blessing....

Because the letter B has two points, one pointing upward, the other backward, so that [if] people say to it, “Who created you?” it will point upward.⁴⁶

None of the commentators suggest that the letters of Scripture might not be intelligible in themselves, but only insofar as they are ordered to composing the words of which they are parts. Now, even if the Rabbis were right to hold that God alone is the author of Scripture, it would not follow of necessity that there would be a meaning to the letters of Scripture beyond the fact that they are needed to form words. But it is more reasonable for one who holds this position about authorship to posit this intelligibility than it would be for one who holds that Scripture was written by men. The reason for this is that the works of God are nobler and therefore more intelligible than the works of man. From this viewpoint it can be seen that if part of the Jewish tradition went to an extreme in positing a perfect intelligibility in Scripture, this was an understandable consequence of its position regarding the authorship of Scripture.

The argument that the inerrancy of Scripture is contained in Jewish tradition is strengthened by the argument that its position is sometimes much more radical. If it wishes to assert a perfect intelligibility in the choice and order of words and letters, then with even greater force it must reject the possibility of error. What is false is not intelligible, since there is no sufficient reason present in the things of which one speaks for saying something false. There may be a reason present in the mind of the speaker to say what is false, but this reason is not present in the things themselves, since if the speaker understood the things, he would speak the truth. But on the other hand, the fact that the Jewish tradition presented above maintains an extreme position weakens its authority with respect to the thesis of inerrancy. This has been addressed above, since the Jewish tradition is used only insofar as it is confirmed by the Church’s tradition. But one might use this as an objection against the Catholic tradition as well. Perhaps the Church received an extreme position from the Jews and only slowly corrected its position over time. Perhaps this process has not yet been completed, so that the Church still maintains or has maintained a greater perfection in Scripture than actually exists in Scripture. This objection will be addressed later, since the precise answer depends on the precise nature of the Catholic tradition in regard to the question.

II. CHRISTIAN TRADITION

a. Fathers of the Church

Next it is necessary to consider Christian tradition with respect to the inerrancy of Scripture, and first the position of the Fathers of the Church. That the Fathers teach the doctrine under

⁴⁵ *Genesis Rabbah*, I.X.1.A.

⁴⁶ *Genesis Rabbah*, I.X.1-5.

consideration with at least moral unanimity can be gathered from three things:⁴⁷ first from their general remarks with regard to the issue, second from their attempts to reconcile even minute differences in the Scriptures, and third from their use of Scripture as an authority in argument. Since the first reason is in itself sufficient, only a few examples will be given illustrating the second reason. It is not necessary to offer illustrations of the third reason because the Fathers' trust in the authority of Scripture is sufficiently manifest in any text of any of the Fathers.

Examples will now be given illustrating the first reason, taken from the earlier Fathers. Justin Martyr testifies,

If you spoke these words, Trypho, and then kept silence in simplicity and with no ill intent, neither repeating what goes before nor adding what comes after, you must be forgiven; but if [you have done so] because you imagined that you could throw doubt on the passages, in order that I might say the Scriptures contradicted each other, you have erred. But I shall not venture to suppose or to say such a thing; and if a Scripture which appears to be of such a kind be brought forward, and if there be a pretext [for saying] that it is contrary [to some other], since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another, I shall admit rather that I do not understand what is recorded...⁴⁸

Irenaeus holds the same opinion:

We should leave things of that nature [Scripture when we cannot understand it] to God who created us, being most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit; but we, inasmuch as we are inferior to, and later in existence than, the Word of God and His Spirit, are on that account destitute of the knowledge of His mysteries...

If, therefore, according to the rule which I have stated, we leave some questions in the hands of God, we shall both preserve our faith uninjured, and shall continue without danger; and all Scripture, which has been given to us by God, shall be found to be perfectly consistent...⁴⁹

Theophilus testifies to the same thing, and explicitly extends it to minute details:

On this account all the prophets spoke harmoniously and in agreement with one another, and foretold the things that would come to pass in all the world. For the very accomplishment of predicted and already consummated events should demonstrate to those who are fond of information, yea rather, who are lovers of truth, that those things are really true which they declared concerning the epochs and eras before the deluge: to wit, how the years have run on since the world was created until now...⁵⁰

The claim found here that the Scriptures are accurate even in minor historical details, while other historical writings are inaccurate, seems to be a common one in early Christian apologetics. Tatian speaks thus:

⁴⁷ In fact, I have not yet discovered a single exception to this 'moral' unanimity. But unless one has read all of the works of all of the Fathers, one cannot deny the possibility of an exception.

⁴⁸ *Dialogue with Trypho*, 65, in ANF, 1:230.

⁴⁹ *Against Heresies*, 2, 28, in ANF, 1:399.

⁵⁰ *To Autolycus*, 17, in ANF, 2:116.

Thus, concerning the age of the aforesaid poet, I mean Homer, and the discrepancies of those who have spoken of him, we have said enough in a summary manner for those who are able to investigate with accuracy. For it is possible to show that the opinions held about the facts themselves also are false. For, where the assigned dates do not agree together, it is impossible that the history should be true. For what is the cause of error in writing, but the narrating of things that are not true?

But with us there is no desire of vainglory, nor do we indulge in a variety of opinions.⁵¹

That is to say, the Greeks disagree in historical questions because they do not have the truth. But Christians, possessing the inspired Scriptures, do not disagree even with respect to minor questions. Tertullian briefly summarizes the teaching of the early Fathers as presented above, “The statements, however, of Holy Scripture will never be discordant with truth.”⁵²

The testimony of the early Fathers shows that the common opinion of the early Church was in favor of the infallible truth of Scripture. Next it is necessary to show that the later Fathers also testify to the same truth. The opinion of St. Augustine has been made sufficiently manifest in the first few pages of this work. St. Ambrose, St. Augustine’s teacher, is fully in accord with his student. He addresses the teaching of the Arians,

“It is written they say, that ‘There is none good but God alone.’ I acknowledge the Scripture—but there is no falsehood in the letter; would that there were none in the Arians’ exposition thereof. The written signs are guiltless, it is the meaning in which they are taken that is to blame.”⁵³

In the context St. Ambrose is making a statement concerning a particular verse of Scripture, but there is no reason to think that he would not wish to make his claim universal. St. Athanasius holds the same position in the East that St. Ambrose and St. Augustine hold in the West:

Now it is the opinion of some, that the Scriptures do not agree together, or that God, who gave the commandment, is false. But there is no disagreement whatever, far from it, neither can the Father, Who is truth, lie; ‘for it is impossible that God should lie,’ as Paul affirms.⁵⁴

St. John Chrysostom reveals his position by speaking of the apparent disagreements among the four Evangelists:

“But the contrary,” it may be said, “hath come to pass, for in many places they [the Evangelists] are convicted of discordance.” Nay, this very thing is a very great evidence of their truth. For if they had agreed in all things exactly even to time, and place, and to the very words, none of our enemies would have believed but that they had met together, and had written what they wrote by some human compact; because such entire agreement as this cometh not of simplicity. But now even that discordance which seems to exist in little matters delivers them from all suspicion, and speaks clearly in behalf of the character of the writers.

But if there be anything touching times or places, which they have related differently, this nothing injures the truth of what they have said.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Address to the Greeks*, 31-32, in ANF, 2:78.

⁵² *A Treatise on the Soul*, 21, in ANF, 3:202.

⁵³ *Of the Christian Faith*, 2, 1, in NPNF, 2nd Series, 10:225.

⁵⁴ *Letter XIX*, in NPNF, 2nd Series, 4:546.

⁵⁵ *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, I, in NPNF, 1st Series, 10:3.

The fact that Chrysostom says that discordance in little matters ‘seems’ to exist, and that he says that this does not detract from the truth of their narratives, shows that he does not believe that discordance exists in any matter whatsoever. He therefore proceeds to reconcile such discrepancies, as will be illustrated below.

Many other similar testimonies can be brought forward. Gregory of Nyssa states: “No one can say that Holy Scripture is in error.”⁵⁶ Similarly, Hilary denies the existence of contradictions in Scripture, “lest these [seemingly contradictory] passages, as the heretics think, should prove that the contradictions of the law make it its own enemy.”⁵⁷ Eusebius the historian, who cannot be unaware of apparent contradictions in historical matters, claims, “One who understands this [the relation between the Gospel of John and the other Gospels] can no longer think that the Gospels are at variance with one another.”⁵⁸ An earlier writer, Julius Africanus, states the reason that false statements cannot be found in Scripture:

For if the generations are different, and trace down no genuine seed to Joseph, and if all has been stated only with the view of establishing the position of Him who was to be born—to confirm the truth, namely, that He who was to be would be king and priest, there being at the same time no proof given, but the dignity of the words being brought down to a feeble hymn,—it is evident that no praise accrues to God from that, since it is a falsehood, but rather judgement returns on him who asserts it, because he vaunts an unreality as if it were reality.⁵⁹

A false statement brings no praise to God, and one must hold that all of Scripture glorifies God. Thus no false statement can be present in Scripture, even for the sake of bringing about some good.

Now that the general position of the Fathers has been presented in their own words, several examples will be given to illustrate the second reason manifesting their opinion, namely, their attempts to reconcile apparent contradictions. The reason that this reveals their position is that if it is possible for false statements to exist in Scripture, then there is no reason to attempt to reconcile apparently contradictory passages if it would compel one to assert something which seems very unlikely. Rather, in such cases one would admit that the sacred author had erred.

St. John Chrysostom offers an example of such an attempt: “But Mark saith, ‘In the days of Abiathar the High Priest:’ not stating what was contrary to the history, but implying that he had two names...”⁶⁰ The history in question says, “David came to Nob to the priest Ahimelech.”⁶¹ Later it appears that Abiathar is the son of Ahimelech. “But one of the sons of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David.”⁶² So at first it might appear that St. Mark confused the father and son. But St. John Chrysostom asserts that the father had two names, Ahimelech and Abiathar. This is not impossible, especially since a son is often named after his father, and so this account would explain the name of the son. Yet it does not seem to be a very likely account, since the supposed double naming of the father goes unmentioned in the Old Testament, and so there is no apparent means by which St. Mark could have known this. Consequently, if St. John Chrysostom believed that the authors of Scripture could be mistaken, he would be likely to say that in this particular instance St. Mark was mistaken and confused the two men in his mind. At another point Chrysostom reveals his general position with respect to such possible disagreements: “But since Luke, also relating this miracle [of the centurion], inserts by the way a good many things

⁵⁶ *Answer to Eunomius’ Second Book*, in NPNF, 2nd Series, 5:273.

⁵⁷ *On the Councils*, 85, in NPNF, 2nd Series, 9:27.

⁵⁸ *Church History*, 3, 24, in NPNF, 2nd Series, 1:153.

⁵⁹ *Epistle to Aristides*, 1, in ANF, 6:125.

⁶⁰ *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, XXXIX, in NPNF, 1st Series, 10:255-256.

⁶¹ 1 Samuel 21:1.

⁶² 1 Samuel 22:20.

which seem to indicate disagreement; these too must be explained by us.”⁶³ He intends to explain them in the sense that he intends to show that what seems to be a disagreement between Matthew and Luke is not a disagreement at all.

A somewhat similar example can be taken from St. Jerome:

“So that there might come upon you all of the just blood, which has been shed upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the just even to the blood of Zachariah the son of Barachiah, whom you killed between the temple and the altar.” ... But others wish [this Zachariah to be understood as] Zachariah, who was killed by Joas the king of Juda between the temple and the altar, as the history of the Kings narrates. But it is to be observed that that Zachariah is not the son of Barachiah, but the son of Joiada the priest.... We ask why he is called the son of Barachiah, and not of Joiada. *Barachiah* in our tongue means *blessed of the Lord*: and the *justice* of the priest Joiada is shown by the Hebrew word.⁶⁴

St. Jerome attempts to reconcile what appears to be a disagreement concerning names by showing that the things signified by the names agree with one another. This would reconcile the texts, presuming that the names are to be understood according to what they signify, rather than merely as names. But once again this kind of interpretation is evidently a consequence of St. Jerome’s belief that Scripture cannot be in error, not simply a result of a careful consideration of the texts themselves. Pope Leo XIII summarizes this argument for the position of the Fathers:

And so emphatically were all the Fathers and Doctors agreed that the Divine writings, as left by the hagiographers, are free from all error, that they labored earnestly, with no less skill than reverence, to reconcile with each other those numerous passages which seem at variance—the very passages which in great measure have been taken up by the “higher criticism”; for they were unanimous in laying it down that those writings, in their entirety and in all their parts were equally from the *afflatus* of Almighty God, and that God, speaking by the sacred writers, could not set down anything but what was true.⁶⁵

The third argument establishing the position of the Fathers is their trust in the authority of Scripture. They assume that a teaching in theology can be established by a single text in Scripture, given that the meaning of the passage is clear. But if it were possible for false statements to be in Scripture, then such an argument would be insufficient. In fact, as was conceded above, the Scriptural reasons for any position, even if abundant, could never be conclusive, until one limited the possibility of error in Scripture. But the Fathers do not need to make such a limitation because they do not admit the possibility of error in any matter whatsoever.

There might seem to be one exception to the general agreement of the Fathers that error cannot be found in Scripture. Origen seems to teach that God put false statements into Scripture for a useful purpose.

But since, if the usefulness of the legislation, and the sequence and beauty of the history, were universally evident of itself, we should not believe that any other thing could be understood in the Scriptures save what was obvious, the Word of God has arranged that certain stumbling-blocks, as it were, and offences, and impossibilities, should be introduced into the midst of the law and the history... And this also we must know, that the principal aim being to announce the “spiritual” connection in those

⁶³ *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, XXVI, in NPNF, 1st Series, 10:178.

⁶⁴ *Commentarium in Evangelium Matthaei*, IV, 23, in *Patrologia Latina*, 26:180. The translation is my own.

⁶⁵ *Providentissimus Deus*, 27.

things that are done, and that ought to be done, where the Word found that things done according to the history could be adapted to these mystical senses, He made use of them, concealing from the multitude the deeper meaning; but where, in the narrative of the development of super-sensual things, there did not follow the performance of those certain events, which was already indicated by the mystical meaning, the Scripture interwove in the history (the account of) some event that did not take place, sometimes what could not have happened; sometimes what could, but did not....

It was not only, however, with the (Scriptures composed) before the advent (of Christ) that the Spirit thus dealt; but as being the same Spirit, and (proceeding) from the one God, He did the same thing both with the evangelists and the apostles—as even these do not contain throughout a pure history of events, which are interwoven indeed according to the letter, but which did not actually occur.⁶⁶

In these passages Origen appears to hold that there are false statements in Scripture which are for the sake of some useful purpose, and for the sake of a spiritual sense. But even if this is his position, Origen alone cannot be taken as an authority, especially in this particular work, *On Principles*, which contains many other errors.⁶⁷ Thus the authority of the Fathers stands on the side of the doctrine of inerrancy, even if this exception is granted.

But it is not necessary to grant the exception. In another place Origen asserts that apparent contradictions between various passages of Scripture must be reconciled. “If the discrepancy between the Gospels is not solved, we must give up our trust in the Gospels, as being true and written by a divine spirit, or as records worthy of credence...”⁶⁸ Here Origen maintains, along with the rest of the Fathers, that it is not permissible to admit the existence of errors in Scripture. Then he attempts to reconcile this claim with his position presented above.

We must, however, try to obtain some notion of the intention of the Evangelists in such matters, and we direct ourselves to this. Suppose there are several men who, by the spirit, see God, and know his words addressed to the saints, and His presence which he vouchsafes to them, appearing to them at chosen times for their advancement. There are several such men, and they are in different places, and the benefits they receive from above vary in shape and character. And let these men report, each of them separately, what he sees in spirit about God and His words, and His appearances to His saints, so that one of them speaks of God’s appearances and words and acts to one righteous man in such a place, and another about oracles and great works of the Lord, and a third of something else than what the former two have dealt with. And let there be a fourth, doing with regard to some particular matter something of the same kind as these three.... He then, who takes the writings of these

⁶⁶ *On Principles*, IV, 15-16, in ANF, 4:364. It seems that Origen’s doctrine is partially a consequence of his opinion concerning providence. If one holds that God is the author of both Scripture and history, then one can say that God composed history so that it would fittingly signify spiritual realities. But if one believes that history is merely an accidental consequence of free wills, one may be compelled to maintain a theory such as Origen’s. Origen holds that history is such an accidental consequence because he denies God’s causality in relation to free will, as in this passage: “Now, that it is our business to live virtuously, and that God asks this of us, as not being dependent on Him nor on any other, nor, as some think, upon fate, but as being our own doing, the prophet Micah will prove when he says, ‘If it has been announced to thee, O man, what is good, or what does the Lord require of thee, except to do justice and to love mercy?’” (*On Principles*, III, 6, in ANF, 4:305).

⁶⁷ A few examples of erroneous opinions that appear to be held by Origen in this work include that all fallen men and angels will be restored at the end of time, that there are no wholly immaterial created beings, that all creatures were created equal, that human souls pre-existed, and that the free will of creatures does not depend on God. See *On Principles*, in ANF, 4:260-262, 266, 270, 292, and 302-328.

⁶⁸ *Commentary on John*, 10, 2, in ANF, 10:382.

men for history, or for a representation of real things by a historical image, and who supposes God to be within certain limits in space, and to be unable to present to several persons in different places several visions of Himself at the same time, or to be making several speeches at the same moment, he will deem it impossible that our four writers are all speaking truth....

In the case I have supposed where the historians desire to teach us by an image what they have seen in their mind, their meaning would be found, if the four were wise, to exhibit no disagreement; and we must understand that with the four Evangelists it is not otherwise.⁶⁹

Thus Origen's position is that the four Evangelists seem to contradict each other because they did not always intend to write history, but sometimes they intended to communicate the spiritual truth through an image. But there is no disagreement between the spiritual truth given by one Evangelist and that given by another. Nor is there disagreement with respect to the historical facts, when the Evangelists intended to convey these facts. Thus Origen holds that there is no error in what the authors of Scripture intended to communicate, but that there is sometimes error in the sentences of Scripture taken in the proper sense of the words, because the writer did not always intend this sense. Origen also intended to say this in the cited passage from *On Principles*. This can be shown from his examples. He says, "And if God is said to walk in the paradise in the evening, and Adam to hide himself under a tree, I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries..."⁷⁰ This example shows that when Origen says that something is false according to the letter, he intends to indicate figurative expressions such as God's 'walking,' which are true according to the intention of the author. Origen's more specific claim is that there are many statements mixed into the histories and into the Gospels which at first sight seem to be historical statements, but which are actually figurative expressions for spiritual truths. This might seem to be a very strange position, but it indicates the intensity of Origen's agreement with the rest of the Fathers concerning the truth of Scripture according to the meaning intended by the authors. The reason for this is that if there is any error in the intended meaning, "we must give up our trust in the Gospels."⁷¹

Thus it has been shown that the position of the Fathers is that no error whatsoever may be found in Sacred Scripture. As Vincent of Lerins says concerning a similar determination of the teaching of the Fathers,

A much greater number of the ancients might have been adduced; but it was needless, because neither was it fit that the time should be occupied by a multitude of witnesses, nor does anyone suppose that those ten were really of a different mind from the rest of their colleagues.⁷²

With reference to the authority of such teaching, Vincent states, "whatsoever these may be found to have held, with one mind and with one consent, this ought to be accounted the true and Catholic doctrine of the Church, without any doubt or scruple."⁷³

The force of Vincent's claim can be intensified by the consideration that this teaching was held with one mind not only by the Fathers, but also by the entire Christian people. In some instances

⁶⁹ *Commentary on John*, 10, 3-4, in ANF, 10:382-383.

⁷⁰ *On Principles*, 4, 16, in ANF, 4:365.

⁷¹ *Commentary on John*, 10, 2, in ANF, 10:382.

⁷² *A Commonitory*, 30, in NPNF, 2nd Series, 11:155. Vincent's witnesses are Peter of Alexandria, Athanasius, Theophilus, Gregory Nazianzus, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Felix and Julius of Rome, Cyprian, and Ambrose. More than ten witnesses have been cited above, although not all can be considered to be the equivalent of these ten.

⁷³ *A Commonitory*, 29, in NPNF, 2nd Series, 11:154.

cited above the Fathers mention certain men who hold the contrary position. It is not difficult to determine that these men are not faithful Catholics, but rather belong to heretical groups.

A first illustration of the nature of those men who deny this teaching can be found in Irenaeus.

So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these [documents], each one of them endeavours to establish his own peculiar doctrine. For the Ebionites, who use Matthew's Gospel only, are confuted out of this very same, making false suppositions with regard to the Lord. But Marcion, mutilating that according to Luke, is proved to be a blasphemer of the only existing God, from those [passages] which he still retains. Those, again, who separate Jesus from Christ, alleging that Christ remained impassible, but that it was Jesus who suffered, preferring the Gospel by Mark, if they read it with a love of truth, may have their errors rectified. Those, moreover, who follow Valentinus, making copious use of that according to John, to illustrate their conjunctions, shall be proved to be totally in error by means of this very Gospel, as I have shown in the first book.⁷⁴

Thus, each heresy denies various parts of Scripture in order to maintain its own truth, although, as Irenaeus points out, it remains possible to refute the heresy from the Scripture that remains. Irenaeus is not merely saying that each heresy denies some part of Scripture implicitly, as one might say that a Protestant denying the primacy of the Pope implicitly denies Christ's gift of the keys to St. Peter. The heretics of whom he speaks explicitly deny the truth of some parts of Scripture, just as most Protestants reject the Old Testament works absent from the Hebrew canon. For example, the Marcionites reject parts, sometimes books, sometimes individual statements, from both the Old and New Testaments.

For all those who are of a perverse mind, having been set against the Mosaic legislation, judging it to be dissimilar and contrary to the doctrine of the Gospel, have not applied themselves to investigate the causes of the difference of each covenant. Since, therefore, they have been deserted by the paternal love... they have apostatized in their opinions from Him who is God, and imagined that they have themselves discovered more than the apostles, by finding out another god; and [maintained] that the apostles preached the Gospel still somewhat under the influence of Jewish opinions, but that they themselves are purer [in doctrine], and more intelligent, than the apostles.⁷⁵ Wherefore also Marcion and his followers have betaken themselves to mutilating the Scriptures, not acknowledging some books at all; and curtailing the Gospel according to Luke and the Epistles of Paul, they assert that these are alone authentic, which they have themselves thus shortened.⁷⁶

Thus Marcion rejected the Old Testament as coming from a God inferior to the God of the New Testament, and rejected parts of the New Testament as remaining under the influence of the Old. This of course is not consistent, as Irenaeus points out:

It follows then, as of course, that these men must either receive the rest of his [Luke's] narrative, or else reject these parts [contained in Luke alone] also. For no persons of

⁷⁴ *Against Heresies*, 3, 11, in ANF, 1:428.

⁷⁵ One might notice some similarity between the Marcionites and those who say that the reason that the Church maintains the doctrine of inerrancy is that it received an erroneous opinion from the Jews. James Burtchaell seems to hold such an opinion, as will be seen later.

⁷⁶ *Against Heresies*, 3, 12, in ANF, 1:434-435.

common sense can permit them to receive some things recounted by Luke as being true, and to set others aside, as if he had not known the truth.⁷⁷

The same might be said of all others who reject the truth of parts of Scripture. For the argument is not that it is impossible for a man to be right about some things and wrong about others, but that it is impossible for a man teaching with God's authority to do this.

Another example can be found in the *Clementine Homilies*, cited earlier as maintaining the existence of false statements in Scripture. First it must be noted that this work has no authority, but is the work of a heretical sect or individual, such as those mentioned by Irenaeus. This is sufficiently established by the following purported conversation between the Apostle Peter and Simon Magus:

And Peter answered: "Our Lord neither asserted that there were gods except the Creator of all, nor did he proclaim Himself to be God, but with reason pronounced blessed him who called Him the Son of that God who has arranged the universe." And Simon answered: "Does it not seem to you, then, that he who comes from God is God?" And Peter said: "Tell us how this is possible; for we cannot affirm this, because we did not hear it from Him.

"In addition to this, it is the peculiarity of the Father not to have been begotten, but of the Son to have been begotten; but what is begotten cannot be compared with that which is unbegotten or self-begotten." And Simon said: "Is it not the same on account of its origin?" And Peter said: "He who is not the same in all respects as some one, cannot have all the same appellations applied to him as that person." And Simon said: "This is to assert, not to prove." And Peter said: "Why, do you not see that if the one happens to be self-begotten or unbegotten, they cannot be called the same; nor can it be asserted of him who has been begotten that he is of the same substance as he who has begotten him?"⁷⁸

In this conversation Simon Magus is represented as holding the Catholic position concerning the nature of Christ, while St. Peter is represented as arguing for what is substantially the Arian position. Thus is it evident that an Arian or one holding some equivalent position is the author of the *Clementine Homilies*.

As was shown above, the book's general position regarding Scripture is that it contains false statements mixed with revealed truth. The reason for this doctrine seems to be that the author believes it to be necessary in order to defend the divine perfection. The following passage offers an example of this belief:

"... But if thou say in thy heart, How did he do that sign or wonder? thou shalt surely know that he who tried thee, tried thee to see if thou dost fear the Lord thy God." The words, "he who tried thee, tried thee," have reference to the earliest times; but it appears to be otherwise after the removal to Babylon. For God, who knows all things, would not, as can be proved by many arguments, try in order that He Himself might know, for He foreknows all things. But, if you like, let us discuss this point, and I shall show that God foreknows. But it has been proved that the opinion is false that He does not know, and that this was written to try us. Thus we, Simon, can be led astray neither by the Scriptures nor by any one else; nor are we deceived into the admission of many gods, nor do we agree to any statement that is made against God.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Against Heresies*, 3, 14, in ANF, 1:439.

⁷⁸ *The Clementine Homilies*, XVI, 15-16, in ANF, 8:316.

⁷⁹ *The Clementine Homilies*, XVI, 13, in ANF, 8:315.

Here “Peter” asserts that a false addition was made to the text of Scripture, indicating that God needs to test men in order to discover something. In order to defend God’s perfection, therefore, it is necessary to say that God allowed the addition of false statements to Scripture for a useful purpose. But the irony is that this writer, so insistent on the perfection of God, falls himself into statements against God, and not only against God incarnate as cited above, but also against God as God. “For He [God] has shape, and He has every limb primarily and solely for beauty’s sake, and not for use.”⁸⁰ Thus this author asserts that God has a body.

It is sufficiently manifest from these examples that those who maintain the existence of false statements in Scripture are not faithful Catholics, but belong to heretical sects. But this becomes even more evident from the testimony of this same author:

Simon, therefore, as I learn, intends to come into public, and to speak of those chapters against God that are added to the Scriptures, for the sake of temptation, that he may seduce as many wretched ones as he can from the love of God. For we do not wish to say in public that these chapters are added to the Bible, since we should thereby perplex the unlearned multitudes, and so accomplish the purpose of this wicked Simon. For they not having yet the power of discerning, would flee from us as impious; or, as if not only the blasphemous chapters were false, they would even withdraw from the word. Whereby we are under a necessity of assenting to the false chapters, and putting questions in return to him concerning them, to draw him into a strait, and to give in private an explanation of the chapters that are spoken against God to the well-disposed after a trial of their faith; and of this there is but one way, and that a brief one.⁸¹

Here the author testifies that it cannot be stated in public that there are false statements in Scripture, because the multitude will either consider it impious or reject Scripture as a whole. Thus it is manifest that the opinion of the multitude is that there are no false statements in Scripture. And so it is sufficiently evident that both the Fathers and the early Church as a whole held this opinion.

b. Later Doctors

The teaching of the later Doctors of the Church will not be explicitly cited here, for three reasons. First, in this matter they follow the teaching of the Fathers, and consequently the argument would be repetitious and somewhat tedious. Second, it is not likely that many will doubt that the teaching of the Doctors agrees with that of the earlier Church. Third, the teaching of the Doctors can be sufficiently summarized by the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, the greatest among the Doctors according to the mind of the Church.⁸² At this point, therefore, it will be sufficient to cite the authority of St. Thomas, and his teaching will be used in more detail later. He teaches this doctrine in many places, including the first question of the *Summa Theologiae*: “In this it is evident that something false can never be [contained] under the literal sense of Sacred Scripture.”⁸³

c. The teaching of the Magisterium

⁸⁰ *The Clementine Homilies*, XVII, 7, in ANF, 8:319.

⁸¹ *The Clementine Homilies*, II, 39, in ANF, 8:236.

⁸² “As we well know from the experience of centuries, the method of Aquinas is singularly preeminent both for teaching students and for bringing truth to light; his doctrine is in harmony with divine revelation, and is most effective both for safeguarding the foundation of the faith, and for reaping, safely and usefully, the fruits of sound progress” [Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (Boston, Mass.: Daughters of St. Paul, n.d.), 12].

⁸³ *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 10, ad 3 (Ottawa, Canada: Commissio Piana, 1953). All translations of St. Thomas are my own.

Now it is necessary to proceed to consider the formal teaching of the Church in regard to the question. It seems that the Church found it necessary to issue formal statements relating to the matter on account of the opposition of heretics such as those discussed above. In the year 260 Pope Dionysius condemned the position of the Marcionites:

For foolish Marcion's doctrine which divides and separates the monarchy into three principles is surely diabolical; moreover, it is not of the true disciples of Christ or of those to whom the teaching of the Savior is pleasing. For these know well that the Trinity is indeed proclaimed in Scripture, moreover, that three gods are taught neither in the Old nor in the New Testament.⁸⁴

This statement directly concerns the position that God the Father and God the Son are diverse Gods. This was reformulated by the Council of Toledo (400): "If anyone says and [or] believes, that there is one God of the Law, another of the Gospels, let him be anathema."⁸⁵ Later this becomes the statement that God is the author of the whole of Scripture. "I believe also that there is one author of the New and Old Testament, of the law both of the Prophets and of the Apostles, namely the omnipotent God and Lord."⁸⁶ The same was forcefully taught by the Council of Florence (1441).⁸⁷

It was shown above that various heresies not only rejected various books of Scripture, but also denied the truth of particular statements contained in Scripture. Thus it became necessary for the Church to reject the positions that would allow such errors. For example, the Church condemned a certain error regarding the poverty of Christ,

Since among learned men it often happens that doubt is again raised as to whether it should be branded as heretical to affirm persistently that our Redeemer and Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles did not possess anything in particular or even in common... we, in a desire to put an end to this controversy, declare on the advice of our brethren by this perpetual edict that a persistent assertion of this kind shall henceforth be branded as erroneous and heretical, since it expressly contradicts Sacred Scripture, which in many passages asserts that they did have some possessions; and since with regard to the aforementioned it openly submits that Sacred Scripture itself, by which surely the articles of orthodox faith are approved, contains a ferment of falsehood and consequently, in so far as in it lies, completely voiding the faith of Scripture it renders the Catholic faith, by destroying its approval, doubtful and uncertain.⁸⁸

Here the Pope echoes the opinion of the Fathers that if one asserts that there are false statements in Scripture, then one must reject it and the Church as reliable teachers. But in this case such an opinion is declared to be definitely heretical. Similarly, Clement VI suggests that the faith requires one to reject such opinions: "In the fourteenth place, [we ask] if you have believed and now believe that the New and Old Testaments in all their books, which the authority of the Roman Church has given to us, contain undoubted truth in all things."⁸⁹ This time the claim is formulated positively. It is necessary to say that the whole of Scripture is true with respect to all the things of which it speaks.

⁸⁴ From an epistle against Tritheists and Sabellians, from H. Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Vail-Ballou Press, 1957), n. 48.

⁸⁵ *Creed of the Council of Toledo*, in Denzinger, n. 28.

⁸⁶ Pope St. Leo IX, *Congratulamur vehementer* (1053), in Denz., n. 348.

⁸⁷ "It [the Church] professes one and the same God as the author of the Old and New Testament, that is, of the Law and the Prophets and the Gospel" (Denz. n. 706).

⁸⁸ Pope John XXII, *Cum inter nonnullos* (1323), in Denz., n. 494.

⁸⁹ *Super quibusdam* (1351), in Denz., n. 570q.

The Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council promulgated similar teachings, but in earlier and more general terms. The Council of Trent teaches, “[The Synod] following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and holds in veneration with an equal affection of piety and reverence all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament, since one God is the author of both...”⁹⁰ Then it condemns an opposing opinion: “If anyone, however, should not accept the said books as sacred and canonical, with all their parts... let him be anathema.”⁹¹ The First Vatican Council makes a similar statement:

And, indeed, these books of the Old and New Testament, whole with all their parts, just as they were enumerated in the decree of the same Council [of Trent], are contained in the older Vulgate Latin edition, and are to be accepted as sacred and canonical. But the Church holds these books as sacred and canonical, not because, having been put together by human industry alone, they were then approved by its authority; nor because they contain revelation without error; but because, having been written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and, as such, they have been handed down to the Church itself.⁹²

This statement intends to say not only that Scripture is free from all error, but also that it is so because God is the author who inspired it. But because of the contrast between inspiration and containing revelation without error, it would be possible to interpret this text otherwise. Similarly, the Council of Trent, although demanding acceptance of all the books of Scripture and all the parts of the books, does not specifically assert the position of John XXII and Clement VI that Scripture is true with respect to all things. On account of this, certain Catholics after Vatican I suggested that there might be minor errors in Scripture. For example, John Henry Newman wrote the following in an essay on the inspiration of Scripture:

And now comes the important question, in what respect are the Canonical books inspired? It cannot be in every respect, unless we are bound *de fide* to believe that ‘terra in aeternum stat,’⁹³ and that heaven is above us, and that there are no antipodes. And it seems unworthy of Divine Greatness, that the Almighty should, in His revelation of Himself to us, undertake mere secular duties, and assume the office of a narrator, as such, or an historian, or geographer, except so far as the secular matters bear directly upon the revealed truth. The Councils of Trent and the Vatican fulfil this anticipation; they tell us distinctly the object and the promise of Scripture inspiration. They specify ‘faith and moral conduct’ as the drift of that teaching which has the guarantee of inspiration.⁹⁴

Here Newman seems to suggest that inerrancy and inspiration extend only to matters of faith and morals. But this is not his final position. After showing that Trent and Vatican I seem to relate inspiration especially to matters of faith and morals, he proceeds:

But while the Councils, as has been shown, lay down so emphatically the inspiration of Scripture in respect of ‘faith and morals,’ it is remarkable that they do not say a word directly as to its inspiration in matters of fact. Yet are we therefore to conclude that the record of facts in Scripture does not come under the guarantee of its

⁹⁰ Session IV (1546), in Denz. n. 783.

⁹¹ Session IV, in Denz. n. 784.

⁹² Session III (1870), in Denz. n. 1787.

⁹³ “The earth stands forever.”

⁹⁴ “Inspiration in its Relation to Revelation,” in *On the Inspiration of Scripture*, ed. J. Derek Holmes and Robert Murray (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Books, n.d.), 108. The essay was written in 1884.

inspiration? We are not so to conclude, and for this plain reason:—the sacred narrative, carried on through so many ages, what is it but the very matter of our faith, and rule of our obedience? What but that narrative itself is the supernatural teaching, in order to which inspiration is given? ... Such is the claim of Bible history in its substantial fulness to be accepted *de fide* as true. In this point of view, Scripture is inspired, not only in faith and morals, but in all its parts which bear on faith, including matters of fact.⁹⁵

Thus Newman does believe that history and other matters fall under inspiration at least to some degree. But nevertheless he accepts the possibility of minor errors in Scripture.

And here I am led on to inquire whether *obiter dicta* are conceivable in an inspired document. We know that they are held to exist, and even required, in treating of the dogmatic utterances of Popes, but are they compatible with inspiration? The common opinion is that they are not....

By *obiter dicta* in Scripture I also mean such statements as we find in the Book of Judith, that Nabuchodonosor was King of Nineve. Now it is in favour of there being such unauthoritative *obiter dicta*, that, unlike those which occur in dogmatic utterances of Popes and Councils, they are, in Scripture, not doctrinal, but mere unimportant statements of fact: whereas those of Popes and Councils may relate to faith and morals, and are said to be uttered *obiter*, because they are not contained within the scope of the formal definition, and imply no binding of the consciences of the faithful. There does not then seem any serious difficulty in admitting their existence in Scripture.⁹⁶

Elsewhere Newman gives an example of what he means by *obiter dicta*.

St. Paul speaks of ‘the cloak which he left at Troas with Carpus.’ Would St. Timothy, to whom he wrote, think this an infallible utterance? And supposing it had been discovered, on most plausible evidence, that the Apostle left his cloak with Eutychus, not with Carpus, would Timothy, would Catholics now, make themselves unhappy, because St. Paul had committed what the Professor [who opposed Newman’s essay] calls ‘a falsehood’? Would Christians declare that they no longer had any confidence in Paul after he had so clearly shown that he ‘had’ *not* ‘the Spirit of God’?⁹⁷

Thus Newman’s position is that it is at least possible that certain statements in Scripture, due to their unimportant character, are not strictly a consequence of inspiration, and are therefore possibly false.⁹⁸ Others held similar positions.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ “Inspiration,” in *On the Inspiration of Scripture*, 109-110.

⁹⁶ “Inspiration,” in *On the Inspiration of Scripture*, 125-126.

⁹⁷ “Further Illustrations,” in *On the Inspiration of Scripture*, 143-144.

⁹⁸ As quoted above, Newman had said only, “There does not then seem any serious difficulty in admitting their [*obiter dicta*] existence in Scripture,” not that they definitely do exist in Scripture. Thus Newman did not say that there are errors in Scripture, but that possibly there are possible errors in Scripture. Newman also differs from many others who held or hold that there are errors in Scripture insofar as he was willing to submit to the judgment of the Church: “I conclude... by unreservedly submitting what I have written to the judgment of the Holy See, being more desirous that the question should be satisfactorily answered, than that my own answer should prove to be in every respect the right one” (“Inspiration,” in *On the Inspiration of Scripture*, 128). Later it will be seen that Newman’s position, although not simply true, contains an element of truth.

⁹⁹ The Modernists, for example, maintained more openly the existence of errors in the Bible, as will be seen in the papal teaching about to be cited. For the reason given in the previous footnote, however, Newman should in no way be associated with the Modernists.

On account of such misunderstandings of the teaching of the Councils, the Popes after the First Vatican Council reinforced the earlier teaching by clearly linking the two errors addressed above, that God is not the author of all of Scripture and that there are false statements in Scripture. Leo XIII teaches, “But it is absolutely wrong and forbidden either to narrow inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture or to admit that the sacred writer has erred.”¹⁰⁰ To narrow inspiration to certain parts of Scripture is equivalent to the error of the heretics who denied that the Old Testament was from the true God, while to admit that the sacred author has erred is the second error of the same heretics. Leo XIII then relates these two errors:

For all the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit; and so far is it from being possible that any error can coexist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true....

Hence, because the Holy Spirit employed men as his instruments, we cannot, therefore, say that it was these inspired instruments who, perchance, have fallen into error, and not the primary author. For, by supernatural power, He so moved and impelled them to write—He so assisted them when writing—that the things which He ordered, and those only, they, first, rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth. Otherwise, it could not be said that He was the Author of the entire Scripture.¹⁰¹

Leo XIII, therefore, teaches that there can be no false statements in Scripture precisely because God is the author of Scripture.

St. Pius X follows Leo XIII in the same teaching:

Thus, even according to themselves [the Modernists] much in the Sacred Books within the field of science and history is affected by error.... Now We, Venerable Brethren, for whom there is one, unique truth, and who regard the Sacred Books thus, “that written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they have God as their author” declare that this is the same as giving the lie of utility, or the officious lie to God Himself...¹⁰²

If God is the author of Scripture, and there are false statements in Scripture, then God tells lies. But this cannot be admitted, and so one cannot say that there are false statements in Scripture.

Benedict XV repeats the teaching of his predecessors:

By the doctrine of Jerome those statements are well confirmed and illustrated by which Our predecessor, Leo XIII, solemnly declared the ancient and constant faith of the Church in the absolute immunity of Scriptures from any errors: *Tantum abest...* And, introducing the definitions of the Councils of Florence and Trent, confirmed in the Vatican Synod, he has the following: “Therefore, nothing at all matters... otherwise He Himself were not the Author of all Sacred Scripture.”¹⁰³

Pope Pius XI shows that he holds the same opinion in a certain Motu Proprio:

¹⁰⁰ *Providentissimus Deus* (1893), 25-26.

¹⁰¹ *Providentissimus Deus*, 26.

¹⁰² *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907), in Denz. n. 2102.

¹⁰³ *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920), in Denz. n. 2186.

Since non-Catholics and rationalists have by it [biblical studies] advanced with temerity and audacity to attack Holy Scripture's authority and immunity from error, it was necessary for our [scholars], instructed with a great abundance of sound learning, to descend into battle, that they might defend the divine gift of Heavenly Wisdom from the contrivances of the false science.¹⁰⁴

Pope Pius XII also reiterates the same doctrine:

For just as the substantial Word of God was made like man in all things "without sin," so also the words of God, expressed in human language, in all things have been made like human speech, without error... Therefore, let the Catholic exegete, in order to satisfy the present day needs of Biblical matters, in explaining Sacred Scripture, and in showing and proving it free of all error, prudently use this aid [investigation about the time of the writing, the literary genres in use, and other such things], to inquire how the form of expression and the kind of literature employed by the Sacred writer, contribute to a true and genuine interpretation...¹⁰⁵

This text and the previous text do not explicitly say that the men who wrote Scripture did not say anything false; they simply state that Scripture is without error.¹⁰⁶ But because of the teaching of the previous Popes, and because Pius XII is here suggesting that when one rightly understands the sense intended by the men who wrote Scripture, this sense is found to be free of error, it is necessary to understand this as a repetition of the previous teaching in its integrity. The later teaching of Pius XII also makes this evident.

To return, however, to the new opinions mentioned above, a number of things are proposed or suggested by some even against the divine authorship of Sacred Scripture. For some go so far as to pervert the sense of the Vatican Council's definition that God is the author of Holy Scripture, and they put forward again the opinion, already often condemned, which asserts that immunity from error extends only to those parts of the Bible that treat of God or of moral and religious matters. They even wrongly speak of a human sense of the Scriptures, beneath which a divine sense, which they say is the only infallible meaning, lies hidden.... Everyone sees how foreign all this is to the principles and norms of interpretation rightly fixed by our predecessors of happy memory, Leo XIII in his Encyclical "Providentissimus," and Benedict XV in the Encyclical "Spiritus Paraclitus," as also by Ourselves in the Encyclical "Divino Afflante Spiritu."¹⁰⁷

In this text Pius XII holds that the human sense of the Scriptures is the same as the divine sense, and therefore that the human sense is free from error. And he clearly affirms that the previous teaching is to be held in its fullness, speaking explicitly of the principles found in the earlier encyclicals.

Thus it is clear that the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture has been taught by the Popes repeatedly. The force of this teaching can be gathered from the Second Vatican Council's statement on the authority of the Pope.

¹⁰⁴ *Bibliorum scientiam* (1924), in *Enchiridion Biblicum* (Rome: Editiones Comm. A. Arnodo, 1954), n 505.

¹⁰⁵ *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), in Denz. n. 2294. As will be seen later, when the Pope speaks of "proving it free of all error" by means of such investigation he speaks only of probable arguments, not of a conclusive proof.

¹⁰⁶ The possibility of distinguishing these two statements will be discussed below.

¹⁰⁷ *Humani Generis*, 9. Pius XII wrote this encyclical in 1950.

This religious docility of the will and intellect must be extended, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak *ex cathedra*, in such wise, indeed, that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and that one sincerely adhere to decisions made by him, conformably with his manifest mind and intention, which is made known principally either by the character of the documents in question, or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated.¹⁰⁸

The precise doctrine under discussion was taught explicitly and solemnly by five successive Popes within 60 years, and was characterized as pertaining to the ancient and constant faith of the Church, and the opposite teaching characterized as absolutely wrong and forbidden. Thus it is clear that according to the mind and intention of these Popes the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture must be accepted with the assent of faith. In order to conform to their mind and intention, therefore, it is necessary to accept the doctrine as pertaining to the deposit of faith.

Even many of those who oppose this doctrine confirm that it pertains to the deposit of faith. For example, Norbert Lohfink, whose position will be examined later, says, “If it is necessary today to discuss the inerrancy of the Bible, it is not the idea itself which is under dispute, for this is an ancient and unequivocal tradition of faith.”¹⁰⁹ But he then proceeds to make it quite equivocal by distinguishing various ways in which the doctrine can be proposed:

In reading the patristic writers, medieval theologians and modern treatises on inspiration, we can clearly see that the inerrancy of the Bible is predicated of three grammatical subjects: the Bible (as a whole), the books of the Bible, and the biblical writers (for which the technical term is “hagiographers” or “sacred writers”). The three ways of speaking of the matter are used simultaneously, the context deciding the choice. In the past century, however, the third mode was brought into the foreground. This happened in treatises on inspiration, as well as in ecclesiastical documents (which we should, in this case, consider not in so far as they state doctrine, but only as they reflect contemporary modes of thought and language—the problem of the exact subject of the statements concerning inerrancy was never subjected to analysis).¹¹⁰

Here Lohfink suggests that the doctrine does not demand that the human authors of Scripture stated nothing false, but only that in some way Scripture does not say anything false. But with respect to the teaching of the Papal encyclicals previously cited, it is clearly not true that the Popes spoke according to custom rather than carefully considering the subject of predication. In the passage cited from *Providentissimus Deus*, Leo XIII carefully distinguishes the human author from the divine author, and makes not only the divine author, but also the human author the subject of inerrancy, and he was followed in this teaching by his successors.¹¹¹

Similarly, with respect to the teaching of the previous Catholic tradition, it is not true that the earlier writers did not think about the subject of predication. For example, St. Augustine distinguishes between what God intended and what man intended in the writing of Scripture:

Thus, when one shall say, “He [Moses] meant as I do,” and another, “Nay, but as I do,” I suppose that I am speaking more religiously when I say, “Why not rather as both, if both be true?” ... He, surely, when he wrote those words, perceived and thought whatever of truth we have been able to discover...

¹⁰⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, III, from *Vatican Council II*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 25.

¹⁰⁹ *The Inerrancy of Scripture and Other Essays* (Berkeley, Calif.: BIBAL Press, 1992), 24.

¹¹⁰ Lohfink, 25-26.

¹¹¹ The purpose of Lohfink’s distinction of the subjects of inerrancy is in order to deny this doctrine directly, by saying that although the divine author asserts nothing false, the human authors do assert what is false.

Finally, O Lord, who art God, and not flesh and blood, if man doth see anything less, can anything lie hid from “Thy good Spirit,” who shall “lead me into the land of uprightness,” which Thou Thyself, by those words, wert about to reveal to future readers, although he through whom they were spoken, amid the many interpretations that might have been found, fixed on but one? Which, if it be so, let that which he thought on be more exalted than the rest. But to us, O Lord, either point out the same, or any other true one which may be pleasing unto Thee...¹¹²

Thus, St. Augustine says, there is no good reason to suppose that the human author of Scripture did not see all the true meanings of a passage. But even if in fact he only saw one, and God saw others, nonetheless the meaning intended by the human author is also true and intended by God, and perhaps even more exalted than the other meanings. St. Augustine is not speaking according to a custom or by chance, but he understands what he is saying.

Similarly, if one returns and examines the tradition regarding the consistency of the Evangelists and of Scripture in general, it becomes manifest that the position being maintained is that the assertion of the human author of Scripture, as his assertion, is without error. The only exception seems to be elements of the Jewish tradition, in which the distinction between the human author and the divine author is not always clear.¹¹³

Thus Lohfink, while granting that the inerrancy of Scripture is a dogma of the Church, suggests that the doctrine does not have to be understood in the way that the Church has understood it in the past. But this is not to develop doctrine, but to deny doctrine: “If anyone shall have said that it is possible that to the dogmas declared by the Church a meaning must sometimes be attributed according to the progress of science, different from that which the Church has understood and understands: let him be anathema.”¹¹⁴ A true development of doctrine must preserve the meaning of the doctrine. In the words of Vincent of Lerins,

The intelligence, then, the knowledge, the wisdom, as well of individuals as of all, as well of one man as of the whole Church, ought, in the course of ages and centuries, to increase and make much and vigorous progress; but yet only in its own kind; that is to say, in the same doctrine, in the same sense, and in the same meaning.¹¹⁵

Thus it is necessary to say that the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture taken precisely in this sense, that the human author of Scripture does not assert anything false in the part of Scripture written by him, belongs to the deposit of faith.

The Church as a whole reaffirmed this teaching at the Second Vatican Council:

To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their powers and faculties, so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.

Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred scriptures.¹¹⁶

¹¹² *Confessions*, XIII, 31-32, in NPNF, 1st Series, 1:188-189.

¹¹³ From this one can begin to answer the objection that the Catholic tradition derives from an error of the Jews. This will be more carefully considered later.

¹¹⁴ Vatican Council I, Session III, canon 3 on Faith and Reason, in Denz. n. 1818.

¹¹⁵ *A Commonitory*, 23, in NPNF, 2nd Series, 11:148. A true development of doctrine will be part of the purpose of the second major part of this work.

¹¹⁶ *Dei Verbum*, III, in *Vatican Council II*, 11.

Here the Council teaches that the reason that the books of Scripture are without error is that all that is affirmed by the human author is affirmed by the Holy Spirit. But it is assumed that everything affirmed by the Holy Spirit is without error. Thus it follows that all that is affirmed by the human author is without error.

But two objections can arise at this point. First, although the Second Vatican Council certainly seems at first sight to confirm the earlier teaching of the Church, it has been interpreted by some men in such a way that it is taken to contradict the earlier teaching. Alois Grillmeier says of Chapter 3 of *Dei Verbum*:

Chapter III of the Constitution gives a short account of the Church's doctrine on the inspiration of Scripture, its truth (inerrancy) and the principles of Catholic exegesis. In the course of the growth of the text as a whole, the position, title and text of this chapter underwent important changes. At a cursory glance they may seem unimportant; but in their development they reveal a particular intention of the Council that cannot be found directly in the actual words of the text. Hence it is essential to indicate the different stages of the growth of the text in order to have an historical basis for the interpretation of its final form.¹¹⁷

Grillmeier's claim is that the document in its final form does not express everything the Council intended to teach, and that in order to show what the Council intended to teach it is necessary to understand the historical process by which the document came to be. He then raises the issue of the inerrancy of Scripture:

It is of special interest to look at the version of the teaching on the inerrancy of Scripture, as it is set out in the former article 12:

"Ex hac divinae Inspirationis extensione ad omnia, directe et necessario sequitur immunitas absoluta ab errore totius Sacrae Scripturae. Antiqua enim et constanti Ecclesiae fide edocemur nefas omnino esse concedere sacrum ipsum errasse scriptorem, cum divina Inspiratio per se ipsam tam necessario excludat et respuat errorem omnem in qualibet re religiosa vel profana, quam necessarium est Deum summam Veritatem, nullius omnino erroris auctorem esse."¹¹⁸

Thus the "absolute inerrancy" of Scripture is stated here in very strong terms, being presented as the ancient and constant conviction of the Church. With this text, in contrast to the final form of the Constitution, the question of the development of teaching on inerrancy at Vatican II must begin.¹¹⁹

From the previous parts of this work, it is clear that the form of the teaching on inerrancy presented here quite accurately expresses the faith of the Church. Nor is there any apparent contradiction between this form and the form that was ultimately taught by the Council and presented above. But Grillmeier wishes to use the changes in order to deny the truth of the earlier formulation.

In the course of the discussion on the schema in the autumn of 1964, various fathers from the Eastern and Western Churches made important speeches on the necessity of

¹¹⁷ "The Divine Inspiration and Interpretation of Sacred Scripture" (Commentary on Chapter 3 of *Dei Verbum*), in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York, N.Y.: Herder and Herder, 1969), vol. 3, 199.

¹¹⁸ "The absolute immunity from error of the whole of Sacred Scripture follows directly and necessarily from the extension of divine inspiration to all things. For by the ancient and constant faith of the Church we are taught that it is entirely wrong to concede that the sacred writer has erred, since divine inspiration in virtue of itself as necessarily excludes and rejects any error in any thing whatever, whether religious or profane, as it is necessary that God the highest Truth should be the author of no error at all."

¹¹⁹ Grillmeier, 200.

an interpretation of the inerrancy of Scripture that would be in harmony with the latest findings of exegesis....

In this respect the most important contribution was undoubtedly the speech by Cardinal König on 2 October 1964. Several other fathers who took part in the discussion from 2 to 6 October either verbally or in writing came back to this point. The Cardinal first of all pointed out the new situation that exists in relation to the question of inerrancy. As a result of intensive Oriental studies our picture of the *veritas historica* and the *fides historica* of Scripture has been clarified. Many of the 19th century objections to the Old Testament in particular and its reliability as an account of historical fact are now irrelevant. But Oriental studies have also produced another finding: "...laudata scientia rerum orientalium insuper demonstrat in Bibliis Sacris notitias historicas et notitias scientia naturalis a veritate quandoque deficere."¹²⁰ Thus Cardinal König admitted that not all the difficulties could be solved. On the contrary, in certain cases they have an urgency that is borne out by scientific research. His speech mentioned a few examples: according to Mk 2:26 David had entered the house of God under the high priest Abiathar and eaten the bread of the Presence. In fact, however, according to Sam 21:1 ff. it was not under Abiathar, but under his father Abimelech. In Mt 27:9 we read that in the fate of Judas a prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled. In fact it is Zech. 11:12f. that is quoted.¹²¹

Here it seems that the Cardinal objects to the inclusion of profane truths under the inerrancy of Scripture on the grounds that scientific studies have shown that there are mistakes with respect to particular matters of history and science in Scripture.¹²² But as Grillmeier points out, the Cardinal "chose a cautious phrase in order to describe the situation."¹²³ If the Cardinal is taken to be saying only that the sacred authors did not know all things in science and history, or even held erroneous positions with regard to these things, and that their lack of knowledge is manifested in some way in the Biblical text, then he does not contradict the doctrine of inerrancy, even in its strict formulation.¹²⁴ But if he means that the sacred authors asserted something false with respect to science and history in the Biblical text itself, then he does contradict the doctrine. Grillmeier understands him in such a way that he does contradict the teaching:

Thus Cardinal König implicitly gives up that premise that comes from the aprioristic and unhistorical thinking that has dominated teaching on inerrancy since the age of the Fathers: if one admits that a sacred writer has made a mistake, then one is necessarily admitting that God has made a mistake with the human author.¹²⁵

But the doctrine is precisely that whatever is asserted by the human author is asserted by the Holy Spirit, and thus it follows, in accord with the "aprioristic" thinking of the Church Fathers, that if the human author has made a mistake, then God has made a mistake. But Grillmeier says that the Cardinal implicitly denied this conclusion. Thus, according to Grillmeier's understanding, the

¹²⁰ "...the excellent science of Oriental things also shows that in the Holy Books historical knowledge and the knowledge of natural science sometimes fall short of the truth."

¹²¹ Grillmeier, 204-205.

¹²² It is not clear that his objections have anything to do with modern science or research, since the same kinds of objections and even many of the very same objections were raised in the time of the Fathers. One example is the apparent disagreement regarding the high priest under which David entered the temple, which St. John Chrysostom directly addressed. Thus there do not appear to be any stronger reasons against the doctrine at the present time than in the time of the Fathers.

¹²³ Grillmeier, 206.

¹²⁴ This will be clarified later.

¹²⁵ Grillmeier, 206.

Cardinal denied the previous teaching concerning inerrancy at least implicitly.¹²⁶ Grillmeier continues by quoting several other Council fathers who “refer to him [Cardinal König] as an authority”¹²⁷ in rejecting the traditional teaching regarding inerrancy:

On 5 October 1964 Cardinal Meyer of Chicago called for both a more profound doctrine of inspiration... “Etenim facilius intelligemus, quomodo divina revelatio componi possit cum humanis debilitatibus, et limitationibus, in instrumento humano, sicut constat ex haud paucis exemplis ipsius Scripturae ad quae etiam Em. Card. Koenig ultima sessione se retulit.”¹²⁸

But this does not support Grillmeier’s point concerning the rejection of the traditional teaching, since Cardinal Meyer does not say that there are false statements in Scripture, but that it is necessary to understand how divine revelation is consistent with the limitations in Scripture present in Cardinal König’s examples. It is possible that his examples reveal human limitations without false statements.

The same is true in a second example:

Archbishop Joao J. da Mota e Albuquerque [receiving this from]¹²⁹ S. Luis do Maranhao of Brazil, made the same point (in writing).... The Council father closes his remarks on Article 11 of the Constitution with the words: “Criterium veritatis Sacrae Scripturae non est illa accurata adaequatio cum factis praeteritis, quam periti scientia historicae profanae obtinere conantur; sed est intentio auctoris inspirati, quae semper aliquo modo se refert ad revelationem salutis.”¹³⁰

Once again it is not clear that the Archbishop wishes to deny the traditional doctrine. Rather he says that the reason that Scripture is true even when there is not an identity between what is narrated and the past facts is that the sacred author did not intend to give the account of a historian, but intended to give the revelation of salvation. There are problems with this explanation, since in some cases the sacred authors may have intended to give a historical account for the sake of the truth of salvation, and in this case truth is not preserved unless historical truth is preserved. But in any case the Archbishop does not explicitly deny that truth is preserved, even if this may be an implicit consequence of his position. In any case, his explicit position is that the truth of Scripture is indeed preserved.

The same is true in the rest of Grillmeier’s examples. None of the fathers explicitly deny the traditional doctrine, but they seek a general explanation for difficulties such as those raised by Cardinal König. Grillmeier gives the following examples:¹³¹

¹²⁶ Grillmeier’s claim that the human author can make a mistake without God making a mistake does not contradict the traditional doctrine if it means only that the human author manifests a mistake, but does not assert his mistake in the text of Scripture. But Grillmeier’s statement that not all the difficulties can be solved, and his rejection of the Scriptural encyclicals, to be cited later, reveal that his claim is that the human author asserts his mistake in the text of Scripture itself.

¹²⁷ Grillmeier, 207.

¹²⁸ Ibid. “For so we might more easily understand how divine revelation can be composed with human weaknesses and limitations in the human instrument, as is proven from the examples, not few in number, which His Eminence, Cardinal König, brought forward from Scripture itself in the last session.”

¹²⁹ The English text has the word *von* here, apparently left untranslated.

¹³⁰ Ibid. “The criterion of the truth of Sacred Scripture is not that accurate identity with past facts which the experts of profane history desire, but it is the intention of the inspired author, which always in some way bears on the revelation of salvation.”

¹³¹ The translations are my own.

For in his speech to the Fathers on October 2, His Eminence Cardinal König rightly showed and contended that Sacred Scripture *exhibits* errors of fact. But Scripture does not *teach* these errors. In other words: if the text is considered materially, there are errors, but if the intention with which the sacred books are written is considered, then errors are not taught. The expression ‘without any error’ is not only merely negative, but also ambiguous, as the same speaker showed. It would be a great help for the thing to be proposed in a clear and positive manner.¹³²

On one hand the general principle of inerrancy is to be asserted; on the other hand its theological elaboration should remain open, that it might be perfected by the positive study of Sacred Scripture; for it is very dangerous to develop this principle by a purely deductive method, ignoring biblical reality. Therefore the most certain and undebated formula taken from the First Vatican Council is proposed. Further, from semantic change, it is evident that the term “error” is obscure today, and if it is not accurately defined, its indiscriminate use can generate grave scandal.¹³³

The affirmation of the inerrancy of Sacred Scripture should be made in other words. This formula is proposed: Since therefore all that the inspired author or hagiographer says ought to be held to be said by the Holy Spirit in the way in which it is said by the hagiographer, thence the books of Sacred Scripture are to be said to exhibit truth in all their parts, but in diverse ways according to the quality of the affirmation of the hagiographer. The reason is that the text [of the Decree in progress] just as it lies does not seem to have considered the diverse strength of truth in diverse sentences of Sacred Scripture, according to the common teaching of exegetes.¹³⁴

The first example claims that the sacred author manifests erroneous beliefs, but does not teach his errors. This may or may not contradict the traditional doctrine, depending on the precise meaning of ‘teaching’. The second statement does not contradict the doctrine, but merely says that it is dangerous to make demands on the text without considering the text, and that a clear statement of absolute inerrancy without an explanation of the biblical text as it stands could cause scandal. The third statement explicitly affirms the traditional doctrine, but states that it is necessary to qualify inerrancy by saying that the statements of the sacred author are true in the sense that he asserts them to be true. They are not necessarily true if he does not assert them, or if he only asserts them to be probable, or sets them down as the opinion of others, or other such things.

Thus none of the Council fathers cited by Grillmeier expressly contradicts the traditional teaching, although a denial of the traditional teaching could be the implication of several statements cited. From this it is reasonable to say that the fathers did not wish to contradict the traditional teaching, but wished to add something to it that would explain the appearances of the biblical text. A clear statement, even if true, of the doctrine of absolute inerrancy such as was first proposed does not explain these appearances, and so the fathers supposed that such a statement without an explanation of the appearances of the biblical text could be a cause of scandal. If some of their statements contradict the traditional teaching in their implications, this is not because the fathers wished to contradict the teaching, but because the problem had not been fully worked out.

Grillmeier continues by stating that these events led to a new understanding of inerrancy:

We have quoted these points made by the Council fathers in some detail, for we must be aware of this background if we are to understand the final formulation of the nature of the truth of Scripture. In accordance with the legitimate method of the interpretation

¹³² Archbishop J.F. Cornelis, in Grillmeier, 207.

¹³³ Archbishop Aníbal Muñoz Duque, in Grillmeier, 208.

¹³⁴ Bishop Alberto Devoto, in Grillmeier, 208.

of conciliar documents in general, here also the whole discussion in the Council and the Theological Commission must be used as sources for a better understanding...

We can see clearly that the old account of inerrancy did not fit in with the general trend of the whole Constitution. Thus the basic idea of Chapter II was to be further developed. This was attempted in a new formulation on the inerrancy of Scripture: "Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error the truth of salvation."¹³⁵

But an objection was raised to the new formula:

The first difficulty was not long in coming: if it was only and exclusively the *veritas salutaris* that was intended as the material object of inerrancy, then the *veritates profanae* are simply placed outside this truth. Would this not mean that the Council was coming close to an interpretation of the extent of inspiration that had been rejected in the nineteenth century, namely as being limited to doctrines of faith and morals? ... The vote of 22 September 1965 showed, in the *modi* submitted, that the fathers feared this false interpretation of the *veritas salutaris*. Hence a large number of fathers suggested simply returning to Form E, i.e., cutting out "*salutaris*" and speaking now of "truth". Their reasoning was that the expression "truth of salvation" would, as against the documents of the teaching office, limit inerrancy to matters of faith and morals.¹³⁶

This objection manifests what was stated above concerning the intention of the Council fathers. They object that the new formulation seems to contradict the traditional doctrine concerning inerrancy. Thus it is manifest that they accept the traditional doctrine. This objection caused a change in the document:

Only in order to avoid a misuse of this expression—in the direction of a limiting of inspiration—a new formula is chosen.¹³⁷ *Veritas salutaris* thus becomes "veritas, quam Deus salutis nostrae causa litteris sacris consignari voluit."¹³⁸ ...

Here the Theological Commission has followed a particular aim—in opposition to the marked activity of a particular group in the Council and the attitude of the Pope to it—namely, to present the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture in a way that was in harmony with the concept of Chapters I and II of the Constitution on Revelation and took more account of the modern difficulties than was possible in the strict formulation of the papal encyclicals on Scripture, and especially the schema of 1962.¹³⁹

Grillmeier claims that the document was changed on account of the objection that it seemed to limit inspiration to the truth of salvation, and that the Theological Commission wished to extend inspiration to all matters, but did not wish to extend inerrancy to all matters. Thus Grillmeier concludes that the Second Vatican Council is to be interpreted in opposition to the traditional teaching regarding inerrancy:

¹³⁵ Grillmeier, 209-210.

¹³⁶ Grillmeier, 210-211.

¹³⁷ The suggestion is that this change was in order to prevent a limiting of inspiration, but not to prevent a limiting of inerrancy.

¹³⁸ "The truth which God wished to be consigned to the holy books for the sake of our salvation."

¹³⁹ Grillmeier, 214-215.

In interpreting the doctrine of inerrancy we must start from this point: “*veritas, quam Deus nostrae salutis causa Litteris Sacris consignari voluit*”. “To have the truth written down in the sacred books for our salvation” is thus presented as the motive (formal object) of inspiration. Whereas *veritas salutaris* had rather the character of a material object from which *veritas profana* was distinguished, the words “to have written down for the sake of our salvation” show a more careful approach, which makes possible a new solution of the problem of inerrancy, and this is intentional. It would be a simplification of the Council’s position if one were to say that the inerrancy of Scripture applied only to the material that contained the truth of salvation (*veritates salutares*) as opposed to secular truths (*veritates profana*). This would be to confront Scripture again with the 19th century position. It would also be a misunderstanding of the Council’s intentions if one said that it had not produced anything new on the question of inerrancy beyond the position of the well-known scriptural encyclicals. The Council starts from a profounder understanding of the nature of Scripture, which presents an inseparable combination of divine and human activity and yet leaves to each its own area. The development of the text has shown us that “monophysitism” in the understanding of inspiration and inerrancy is to be given up, as presented in the thesis of verbal inspiration, but also in the version of the teaching on inerrancy found in the form of 1962 (and in the scriptural encyclicals).¹⁴⁰

In this passage Grillmeier’s position is that the Council must be understood to deny the traditional doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. He does not merely divide statements regarding faith and morals from other statements and say that only one class is free from error, but he does say that not all statements are free from error. Thus he holds either that some statements regarding matters other than faith and morals are false, or that error infects even statements regarding such matters.¹⁴¹

But there are four reasons that this interpretation of the Council cannot be correct. First, it was sufficiently shown above that the traditional teaching is a dogma of the Church, and so the Council should not be interpreted to contradict this teaching unless it does so according to its plain sense, and unless no other interpretation is possible. But the plain sense of the Council is fully in accord with the traditional teaching. Grillmeier himself would admit that the inerrancy of Scripture is a dogma of the Church, but would assert that there has been a development in the Church’s understanding of the teaching. But the possibility of this kind of development in the teaching of the Church has been refuted above.

Second, Grillmeier’s method of interpretation is flawed from the start. The Council cannot be interpreted according to the historical method that he employs, because the Council fathers who voted for the document could not assume that all would know this historical process. Thus the fathers voting for the document must be taken to be teaching what the document asserts in its final form and in its plain sense, which is not only entirely consistent with the traditional teaching, but reaffirms this teaching. It is true that one may take into account the discussions which went into the formation of a document, but not in order to interpret it against its manifest sense. And if one maintains nonetheless that their teaching must be understood to oppose the traditional teaching, a Council has authority only insofar as it has Papal confirmation. But Grillmeier concedes, as cited above, that the Pope did not wish to put any limitation on inerrancy. Thus even if some of the Council fathers desired such a limitation, the Council insofar as it has authority cannot be interpreted in this way.

Third, even if it is granted that Grillmeier uses the correct method of interpretation, he misunderstands the intention of the Council fathers. It was shown above that the Council fathers

¹⁴⁰ Grillmeier, 234-235.

¹⁴¹ In regard to the division between secular matters and questions of faith and morals, one might consider the teaching of Christ: “If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?” (John 3:12).

did not wish to contradict the traditional teaching on inerrancy, but wished to avoid scandal and to explain in a general way the presence of difficulties in Scripture.

Fourth, even if it is granted that Grillmeier uses the correct method of interpretation and has rightly understood the thought of the Council fathers, it does not follow that what they said in the Council itself contradicts the former teaching. From the text of the Council itself it is evident that it does not contradict that teaching. One cannot take the statement that whatever is asserted by the human author is asserted by the Holy Spirit to mean either that the human author asserts some false things, or even that it is not necessary to hold that the human author does not assert anything false. But the authority of the Council could be used against the former teaching of the Church only if the Council contradicted that former teaching or stated that it was not necessary to accept that former teaching. It thus follows that to use the Council against the former teaching of the Church is rather an abuse than a use of the Council.

Thus the Second Vatican Council must be understood according to its plain sense, which is that God asserts everything asserted by the human author, and it follows from this that Scripture is perfectly free from error.

But it is not sufficient to show that this is the meaning of the Council. Besides the objection that interprets *Dei Verbum* to contradict the earlier teaching, a second objection that has been made is that regardless of the meaning of *Dei Verbum*, the earlier teaching does not bind, because the Church has in any case rejected the teaching in the period after the Council. Raymond Brown holds such a position.¹⁴²

Essential to a critical interpretation of church documents is the realization that the Roman Catholic Church does not change her official stance in a blunt way. Past statements are not rejected but are requoted with praise and then reinterpreted at the same time. It is falsely claimed that there has been no change towards the Bible in Catholic Church thought because Pius XII and Vatican II paid homage to documents issued by Leo XIII, Pius X, and Benedict XV and therefore clearly meant to reinforce the teaching of their predecessors. What really was going on was an attempt gracefully to retain what was salvageable from the past and to move in a new direction with as little friction as possible. To those for whom it is a doctrinal issue that the Church never changes, one must repeat Galileo's *sotto voce* response when told that it was a doctrinal issue that the earth does not move: 'E pur si muove' ('Nevertheless, it moves'). And the best proof of movement is the kind of biblical scholarship practiced by ninety-five percent of Catholics writing today, a kind of scholarship that would not have been tolerated for a moment by church authorities in the first forty years of this century.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Brown accepts the first objection as well, but this does not need separate treatment because he simply refers to Grillmeier's interpretation of the Council.

¹⁴³ Raymond Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1981), 18-19, footnote 41. 'Ninety-five percent' is not one hundred percent. Cardinal Bea interprets the Council in accordance with the traditional doctrine [*The Word of God and Mankind* (Chicago, Ill.: Franciscan Herald, 1967), 184-193]; cited by Brown in the following footnote. Similarly, Pierre Grelot did his best to maintain the doctrine of inerrancy while attempting to explain the appearances of Scripture, just as the Council fathers wished to do. See his book, *Introduction to the Bible*, tr. G. Patrick Campbell (New York, N.Y.: Herder and Herder, 1967), esp. 400-404. More recently, Fr. William Most has written a rather more polemical work defending inerrancy, *Free From all Error* (Libertyville, Ill.: Franciscan Marytown Press, 1985). Fr. Most spends a great deal of time on particular objections and exegetical ways of defending inerrancy, and often seems not to appreciate the force of the more general objections to the doctrine.

In the first place, Brown's position cannot be correct because it asserts the mutability of dogma, openly and deliberately contradicting the definition of Vatican I cited above.¹⁴⁴

Second, Brown is not quite accurate in his description of the facts. The injustice that Brown does to Pius XII by saying that he intended to move away from the teaching of his predecessors is manifest from the previous pages. It is indeed evident that Pius XII intended to reinforce the teaching of his predecessors in its integrity, and he says explicitly that this is his intention. Similarly, as was shown above, Vatican II did not wish to oppose the earlier teaching, but wished to avoid scandal and to seek an explanation for difficulties. And thus it is not falsely but rather truly claimed that there has been no change in the Church's teaching in regard to the doctrine of inerrancy.

Brown's "best proof of movement" is answered quite simply by the fact that biblical scholars do not constitute the Church's teaching office. Even if there were no explanation for the Church's relative silence since the Council, one would not thereby be justified in rejecting the past teaching of the Magisterium, or in saying that the past teaching is no longer binding. In any case, it is reasonable to suppose that the reason for this relative silence is the same as the Council's reason for not adopting the more rigorous formulation: namely that there has not yet been an adequate explanation for the appearances of Scripture.¹⁴⁵

Thus the teaching of the Second Vatican Council remains binding, and must be understood according to its plain sense, which is that all that is asserted by the human author is asserted by the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit cannot be said to assert any error whatsoever, and therefore it is necessary to say that the original formulation was quite correct. Everything asserted by the human authors of Scripture is free from error in every matter, whether sacred or profane. But it is necessary to reconcile this truth with the general appearances of the text of Scripture as it stands in order to fulfill the intentions of the Council fathers, and so this will be in part the purpose of the remainder of this work.

¹⁴⁴ In various places Brown attempts to justify this stance by *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, a document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. But this document merely says that the way in which a dogma is stated is changeable, while the substance of the dogma is unchangeable: "As for the *meaning* of dogmatic formulas, this remains ever true and constant in the Church, even when it is expressed with greater clarity or more developed" [*Mysterium Ecclesiae*, from an excerpt in Brown, *Biblical Reflections on Crises Facing the Church* (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1975), 117-118].

¹⁴⁵ The Church has not been entirely silent. Magisterial documents continue to quote Scripture as absolutely authoritative, manifesting a continued belief in the doctrine of inerrancy. The Catechism reaffirms the teaching of the Council, "The inspired books teach the truth. 'Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures'" [*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 1994), 107]. Similarly, Pope John Paul II manifests his belief in this doctrine in various ways. For example, he said during an address given on April 23, 1993, "Thus we note that, despite the great difference in the difficulties they had to face, the two encyclicals [*Providentissimus Deus* and *Divino Afflante Spiritu*] are in complete agreement at the deepest level. Both of them reject a split between the human and the divine, between scientific research and respect for the faith, between the literal sense and the spiritual sense. They thus appear to be in perfect harmony with the mystery of the Incarnation. The strict relationship uniting the inspired biblical texts with the mystery of the incarnation was expressed by the Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in the following terms: Just as the substantial Word of God became like men in every respect except sin, so too the words of God, expressed in human languages, became like human language in every respect except error" (from *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, par. 5-6). Thus Pope John Paul II shows that he accepts the teaching of the encyclicals and therefore refuses to divide the human sense from the divine sense in order to allow for error in Scripture.

III. The Rule of Faith considered by Reason

A. Inerrancy considered in itself

The doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture must now be considered by reason. It will be considered first in itself and second in relation to theology as a whole. With respect to the first task, the doctrine in itself will be considered and then objections to the doctrine will be answered. The consideration of the doctrine in itself has two parts. First the doctrine will be proven by reason and then contrary positions will be considered. It is necessary to begin with some other revealed truth in order to prove the doctrine, because the inerrancy of Scripture cannot be established by natural reason alone. Now, the Church not only teaches the doctrine of inerrancy, but also gives reasons for its teaching, some of which have been seen in passing in the first part of this work. The best way to approach the issue, therefore, is to consult the authority of the Church once again, in order to find the argument. Then the argument can be considered in greater detail.

I. INERRANCY PROVEN BY REASON

a. Direct proof of the inerrancy of Scripture

Pope Leo XIII offers a fairly long argument establishing the inerrancy of Scripture, which has been cited above in considering the teaching of the Church. It would be useful to return once again to this argument.

It may also happen that the sense of a passage remains ambiguous, and in this case good hermeneutical methods will greatly assist in clearing up the obscurity. But it is absolutely wrong and forbidden either to narrow inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture or to admit that the sacred writer has erred. As to the system of those who, in order to rid themselves of these difficulties, do not hesitate to concede that divine inspiration regards the things of faith and morals, and nothing beyond, because (as they wrongly think) in a question of the truth or falsehood of a passage we should consider not so much what God has said as the reason and purpose which He had in mind in saying it—this system cannot be tolerated.

For all the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit; and so far is it from being possible that any error can coexist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true....

Hence, because the Holy Spirit employed men as his instruments, we cannot, therefore, say that it was these inspired instruments who, perchance, have fallen into error, and not the primary author. For, by supernatural power, He so moved and impelled them to write—He so assisted them when writing—that the things which He ordered, and those only, they, first, rightly understood, and then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth. Otherwise, it could not be said that He was the Author of the entire Scripture....

It follows that those who maintain that an error is possible in any genuine passage of the sacred writers either pervert the Catholic notion of inspiration or make God the author of such error. And so emphatically were all the Fathers and Doctors agreed that the divine writings, as left by the hagiographers, are free from all error, that they labored earnestly, with no less skill than reverence, to reconcile with each other those

numerous passages which seem at variance—the very passages which in great measure have been taken up by the “higher criticism”; for they were unanimous in laying it down that those writings, in their entirety and in all their parts were equally from the *afflatus* of Almighty God, and that God, speaking by the sacred writers, could not set down anything but what was true.¹⁴⁶

This argument proceeds by the following steps. The Pope’s first proposition is that all Scripture is inspired by God. From this it follows that God is the author of all of Scripture, and from this that not even the human instrument can fall into error, because this would “either pervert the Catholic notion of inspiration or make God the author of such error.” But God cannot be the author of any error. Therefore even the human author cannot be the author of any error.

In brief, the argument consists of the major premise that nothing that has God for its author is false, and the minor premise that every part of Sacred Scripture has God for its author. The conclusion is that no part of Sacred Scripture is false. This is the same argument that was made from the authority of Scripture itself in the first part of this work.

But one might object that this does not prove that the human author of Scripture cannot make a mistake, because the conclusion is not that no part of Scripture contains error in any way, but that no part of Scripture contains error insofar as God is the author. For example, Scripture says, “In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, ‘God will not seek it out’; all their thoughts are, ‘There is no God.’”¹⁴⁷ Thus the sentence, “There is no God,” is part of Scripture, and this sentence is certainly false. But God is not the author of this sentence as asserting it himself, but as expressing the mind of the wicked. But some do indeed believe that God does not exist, and so the sentence is not false insofar as God is its author. Similarly, one might think that because God and man are not authors of Scripture in the same respect, some part of Scripture can be false insofar as man is the author, but not false insofar as God is the author. But according to Pope Leo XIII this position perverts the Catholic understanding of inspiration. In order to understand this it is necessary to consider the argument in greater detail.

First the major premise will be considered, and then the minor. That God is not the author of error is not explicitly denied by anyone involved in the debate concerning the inerrancy of Scripture, but nonetheless this consideration is necessary in order to attain a complete understanding of the matter. In regard to this it is beneficial to consider St. Thomas’ treatment of the virtue of faith.

St. Thomas argues that one cannot believe something false by divine faith:

It should be said that nothing falls under any power, habit, or act, except by reason of the formal object, as color cannot be seen except through light, and a conclusion cannot be known except through the medium of demonstration. But it was said that the formal account of the object of faith is the first truth. Whence nothing can fall under faith except insofar as it stands under the first truth, under which nothing false can stand, just as non-being cannot stand under being, nor evil under goodness. Whence it follows that nothing false can stand under faith.¹⁴⁸

The formal object of faith is said to be the first truth because one assents by faith to what is revealed by God, who is the first truth.

¹⁴⁶ *Providentissimus Deus*, 25-27.

¹⁴⁷ Psalm 10:4.

¹⁴⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 1, 3, corp.

So therefore in faith, if we consider the formal account of the object, it is nothing other than the first truth: for the faith of which we speak does not assent to anything except because it is revealed by God; whence faith is based upon divine truth as a medium.¹⁴⁹

The reason that faith cannot assent to anything false is therefore that faith assents to what is revealed by God, while nothing revealed by God can be false because something false cannot “stand under” the first truth. The same reason can be given in order to explain the fact that God cannot be the author of error. It is not necessary to understand the precise nature of authorship or of revelation in order to see that these two parallel claims are necessarily true, because these positions are particular forms of a more universal truth. God, the first truth, cannot be the proper cause of any error at all, and authorship and revelation are particular ways of causing something. God is truth itself, and therefore he cannot be the cause of error, just as heat cannot be the cause of cold, or good of evil.

Thus it follows that faith can assent to Sacred Scripture, and error is excluded from it, insofar as God is its cause.

But infidelity can be all about all the things that are contained in Sacred Scripture: for whatever of these a man should deny, he is held to be unfaithful.... And to them [revealed truths concerning created things, including the matters contained in Sacred Scripture] also we assent on account of the divine truth.¹⁵⁰

But the problem raised above still remains. Perhaps part of Scripture is false, not insofar as it is from God, but insofar as it is from man. In order to resolve this difficulty it is necessary to consider the minor premise of the argument for the inerrancy of Scripture, which is that God is the author of the whole of Scripture.

It seems that the original sense of the claim that God is the author of the Old and New Testaments was that God is the source of both Testaments. Testament was also understood broadly, because it included the whole temporal dispensation. The Church condemned Marcion and his followers because they claimed that one God was the source of the Old Covenant and a different and better God was the source of the New. If author is understood in this wide sense, one cannot say that God is not the author of some part of Scripture without implying the existence of another God. But as the doctrine developed the term was narrowed to mean something much more specific, by analogy with the use of the term as applied to the human author of a book. This more narrow use of the term can be seen in Pope Leo XIII’s argument presented above.

One form of the Modernist heresy maintains that God is author only in the sense that he is Creator. One claims, “God is the author of the Bible just as he is the architect of St. Peter’s in Rome and Notre Dame in Paris.”¹⁵¹ Similarly, another says,

In one sense therefore God, in this view, is the author of prophecy only in the same way that He is the author of everything that any man says or writes.... Hence, that God is the author of our thoughts does not mean that He has thought them; nor has He willed what we will; or said what we have said; or done what we have done.¹⁵²

The second example, by Tyrrell, shows the consequences of this position. If God is the author of Scripture only insofar as he is the Creator, then he is not more the author of Scripture than he is the

¹⁴⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 1, 1, corp.

¹⁵⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 1, 1.

¹⁵¹ Alfred Loisy, *Simplex Reflexions sur le Décret du Saint-Office Lamentabili sane Exitu et sur l’Encyclique Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (2nd ed.; Ceffonds: chez l’auteur, 1908), 45; cited by James Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 228.

¹⁵² George Tyrrell, *The Church and the Future* (London: The Priory Press, 1910), 165-166; cited by Burtchaell, 206.

author of every book that has ever been written. From this it would follow that Scripture has no more authority than any other book. This is not an accidental consequence of the Modernist position, but is the reason for the position. As Burtchaell points out, “It should be noted that in 1907 Loisy admitted that he had no belief in God or in any spiritual reality...”¹⁵³ Loisy thus does not actually hold the stated position, but wishes Catholics to hold this position in order that Scripture’s authority may be removed. Thus he says,

To imagine that God has written a book is to commit the most infantile of anthropomorphisms; but, naïve as it sounds in itself, the ambiguity is terrific in its consequences. As one imagines that God has written, one affirms also that he has taught, that he has defined Himself in Scripture; from that revelation are drawn the laws of thought; and all that does not conform, that is to say all effort toward a greater truth, every new acquisition of the human spirit is rejected. It is thus that a mythological concept becomes a barrier that one would like to make insurmountable, not only for the progress of science, but for all progress of humanity.¹⁵⁴

If this statement is compared with the teaching of St. Thomas on the authority of Scripture, it becomes clear that Loisy is not entirely wrong about the traditional authority ascribed to Scripture, although he may be wrong to assert that this authority prevents progress.¹⁵⁵ St. Thomas teaches that sacred doctrine judges all other sciences:

And therefore it does not pertain to it [sacred doctrine] to prove the principles of other sciences, but only to judge about them; for whatever is found in the other sciences opposed to the truth of this doctrine, the whole is condemned as false; whence it is said in 2 Corinthians 10:4, “destroying counsels, and every height extolling itself against the science of God.”¹⁵⁶

The strongest form of argument used in sacred doctrine is the argument from the authority of Scripture.

It is to be said that to argue from authority is most of all proper to this doctrine, because the principles of this doctrine are had by revelation, and so it is necessary that it be believed on the authority of those to whom the revelation was made. Nor does this derogate from the dignity of this doctrine; for although the argument from authority which is founded upon human reason is the weakest, the argument from authority which is founded upon divine revelation is the most efficacious.... But it [sacred doctrine] uses the authority of canonical Scripture properly, and as concluding with necessity.¹⁵⁷

Thus St. Thomas holds the position attacked by Loisy, that anything whatever found in the other sciences contrary to Sacred Scripture must be entirely rejected. This disagreement shows the necessity of taking the divine authorship of Scripture in a more specific sense, as do St. Thomas and Pope Leo XIII, if one does not wish to deny the authority of Scripture entirely, as Loisy does.

On the other hand, one cannot say that God is the author of Scripture in the precise manner that a man writes out a book with his own hands. Some things in Scripture are more attributed to the man writing Scripture than to God. St. Thomas gives the example, “Whence also the Apostle said

¹⁵³ Burtchaell, 228.

¹⁵⁴ Loisy, *Simple Reflexions*, 45; cited by J. Burtchaell, 228.

¹⁵⁵ This depends on what one considers as progress.

¹⁵⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 6, ad 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 8, ad 2.

in 1 Corinthians 7:12, when he would give a certain counsel, ‘I speak, not the Lord.’”¹⁵⁸ And in general the human authors of Scripture often attribute things to themselves that they do not intend to be attributed to God, as was stated in the introduction to this work. “If it is well told and to the point, that is what I myself desired; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do.”¹⁵⁹ The author of this text does not wish to assert that God could not write a better account. It is therefore necessary to account for the fact that some things are to be attributed to the human author that cannot be attributed to God, but without denying, as do the Modernists, that God is truly the author of Scripture.

In order to understand the truth of the matter, it is useful to consider the source of the claim that God is the author of Scripture. At the beginning of the discussion of this claim as the minor premise in the argument for the inerrancy of Scripture, it was stated that the original meaning of this statement, in the Church’s teaching, was that God is the source of Scripture, and of the whole temporal order. Later the statement was taken in a more specific sense, as was said above. The reason for this development is that this teaching of the Church rests upon something more fundamental, namely, Scripture. This foundation provides a source of development, and therefore also a source of understanding the doctrine in its developed form.

Scripture asserts that God is its author in various ways.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory.¹⁶⁰

Here St. Peter teaches that when the prophets testified to the future coming of Christ, the Spirit of Christ, who is a divine Spirit, also testified to the same. King David makes a similar remark about himself: “The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue.”¹⁶¹ Thus David says that when he speaks the spirit of the Lord speaks through him, and that David’s words are the words of the divine Spirit. Similarly, in other places the words of Scripture are directly attributed to the Holy Spirit. “Paul made one further statement: ‘The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah...’”¹⁶² In several of these cases the reason for the attribution could be that the quotation was of a text spoken from the person of God. But as was said in the first part of this work, this does not happen only when the words of God spoken as from his own person are quoted. “Of the angels he [God] says, ‘He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire.’”¹⁶³ In such places it is claimed that God said what the human authors of Scripture said.

All of the above passages can be summarized by the last one, which says that the words of the men who wrote Scripture are also the words of God, that is, that what these men said, God said. Writings of which this is true are called inspired, being the effect of the Holy Spirit. This name is also taken from Sacred Scripture.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 92, 2, ad 2.

¹⁵⁹ 2 Maccabees 15:38.

¹⁶⁰ 1 Peter 1:10-11. A similar example, quoted in the first part of this work, can be found in Acts 1:16-20.

¹⁶¹ 2 Samuel 23:2.

¹⁶² Acts 28:25.

¹⁶³ Hebrews 1:7.

¹⁶⁴ 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

Which “Scripture” (*graphie*), or “sacred writings” (*hiera grammata*), are inspired by God is not entirely clear from this passage. If Scripture is taken as writings in general, then it seems to be asserted that all written things are inspired by God, which is neither true nor the meaning intended by St. Paul. Thus this must be taken in a more limited sense. It is reasonable to say that St. Paul refers to the Old Testament, because it is customary to refer to it as what is ‘written.’ Christ argues against Satan, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone...’”¹⁶⁵ Thus it seems that inspiration is attributed to the Old Testament. But one might suppose from the context that St. Paul also refers to certain New Testament writings, because he says that these writings instructed Timothy with respect to the faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁶⁶ But regardless of which books St. Paul speaks of in this place, the Church recognizes that the inspiration of Scripture extends to all the books of both the Old and New Testaments, as was shown in the first part of this work. Whether or not it can be proven conclusively from Scripture, according to the understanding of the Church it is necessary to extend the words of David concerning himself to the whole of Scripture: whatever the human authors of Scripture said, the Holy Spirit said through them.

Thus the claim that God is the author of Scripture rests upon the more fundamental position, taught by Scripture itself and extended by the Church to the whole of Scripture, that God said what the human authors of Scripture said.

This belief [in the authorship of God] has been perpetually held and professed by the Church in regard to the books of both Testaments; and there are well known documents of the gravest kind, coming down to us from the earliest times, which proclaim that God, who spoke first by the Prophets, then by His own mouth, and lastly by the Apostles, composed also the canonical Scripture, and that these are His own oracles and words—a Letter written by our Heavenly Father and transmitted by the sacred writers to the human race on its pilgrimage so far from its heavenly country.¹⁶⁷

The words of Scripture, words of men inspired by God, are the words of God. From this the solution to the original difficulty, namely, that perhaps something in Scripture might be true insofar as God is its author and false insofar as man is its author, is evident. If the human author said something false, then God said something false, since what is said by the human author is said by God. But this is opposed to the major premise of the argument establishing Scripture’s inerrancy insofar as it is from God, and so it is necessary that Scripture should be true also as regards the human authors.

But someone might attempt to preserve the force of the objection by saying that it is not necessary to take ‘saying’ in such a strong sense. The Psalmist did not say that there is no God, but he did speak words that signify the denial of God’s existence, in order to express the mind of the wicked. Similarly, perhaps the human author of Scripture said something false, while God did not say something false, but spoke words that signify something false, but with another purpose in mind, just as did the Psalmist. The Psalmist did not say that God does not exist, but that some men believe this.

In order to answer this form of the objection it is necessary to consider the nature of speech. In his consideration of the Second Person of the Trinity, St. Thomas discusses the nature of words.

¹⁶⁵ Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4.

¹⁶⁶ This conclusion does not follow of necessity, since Timothy could also be instructed by the Old Testament insofar as it is understood as prophetic of Christ. Even so, certain New Testament writings seem to have been counted as Scripture even at the time, as in this passage: “For the scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer deserves to be paid’” (1 Timothy 5:18). The two quotations are taken from Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7. Thus the Old Testament and the Gospel of Luke are equated as Scripture.

¹⁶⁷ Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, 3-4.

In order to understand this, it should be known that among us word is said properly in three ways, while in a fourth way it is said improperly or figuratively. More manifestly and commonly among us that is called a word which is brought forth by the voice. This proceeds from the interior with respect to two things found in the external word, namely voice itself and the signification of voice. For voice signifies the concept of the intellect, according to the Philosopher in book I of *On Interpretation*; and again voice proceeds from signification or imagination, as is said in the book *On the Soul*. But voice that does not signify anything cannot be called a word. The external voice is called a word, therefore, from this, that it signifies the interior concept of the mind. Thus the interior concept of the mind is first and principally called a word; secondarily voice that signifies the interior concept; thirdly the imagination of voice.... But in a fourth way, what is signified or effected by a word is figuratively called a word, as it is customary to say, this is the word that I said to you,¹⁶⁸ or that the king commanded, pointing out something which was signified by the word of the one simply speaking, or commanding.¹⁶⁹

St. Thomas does not mention the written word in this passage, because it is not necessary for an understanding of the Trinity, but it could be added that the written word is called a word insofar as it signifies the spoken word. In another place St. Thomas explains how one can use these senses to speak of the word of God.

The word of the voice, therefore, because it is goes forth in a bodily manner, cannot be said of God except metaphorically: insofar as either creatures, or their motions, produced by God are called his word insofar as they signify the divine understanding as an effect signifies its cause. Whence, for the same reason, neither will the word which bears an image of voice be able to be said of God properly, but only metaphorically; and thus the ideas of things to be made are called the word of God. But the word of the heart, which is nothing other than what is actually considered by the understanding, is said properly of God, because it is entirely removed from materiality and every defect; and things of this kind are said properly of God, as knowledge and the thing known, understanding and the thing understood.¹⁷⁰

Here St. Thomas distinguishes several metaphorical senses, while in the previous passage he speaks of only one. The reason for this is that in the latter passage he shows how the senses can be modified so that something can be called God's word, while in the former passage he simply distinguishes the senses present in common speech. In order to understand the relation between these two passages, it is necessary to consider the four senses distinguished in the first passage, and how these senses can be used to speak of God's word.

The first kind of word is the interior word, the concept of a thing understood. For example, one who understands man must form a concept of man. This kind of word is said properly of God, and signifies the concept proceeding from the mind of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."¹⁷¹

Second is the word of the voice, and along with this the written word, which is called a word because it signifies the word of the voice. This is the most manifest kind of word. St. Thomas says that God can be said to have a word of this kind only metaphorically, but this metaphorical sense is not the metaphorical fourth sense in the first passage. For St. Thomas explains that something is called a word in this second sense because it signifies the divine understanding, while something is

¹⁶⁸ It is now more customary to say, "That's what I said," or something of the kind.

¹⁶⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, I, 34, 1, corp.

¹⁷⁰ *De Veritate* (Rome: Marietti, 1914), 4, 1, corp.

¹⁷¹ John 1:1.

called a word in the fourth sense because it is something signified by a word. Thus something is said to be God's word in the second way when it is produced in order to signify the divine understanding, and it is metaphorical in this respect, that God does not produce it in a bodily manner. "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'"¹⁷² This was not a voice produced by bodily organs, but it is called a voice because it was the sound of a voice, and because God produced it in order to signify the mind of the Father. Thus there are two things involved that make this the word of the Father. First, God produced a voice. Second, he produced it in order to signify his understanding. It is for this reason that this voice is the voice of the Father alone, although the Son and the Spirit cooperated in producing the voice. It is only intended to signify the understanding of the Father, which happens to be the same as the understanding of the Son and Spirit.

In the same way a written word can be called a word of God. The prophets offer good examples of this. "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: See, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?"¹⁷³ It is not clear whether Jeremiah actually heard a voice, or only perceived this by imagination or intellect.¹⁷⁴ But the written text of Scripture first signifies these words as sounds, and through the words as sounds it signifies the divine understanding, even if the words as sounds might not have actually existed. Similarly, the written text of this work signifies speech, and concepts through speech, although some parts of it have never been spoken.

The example from Jeremiah signifies the divine understanding in the manner of something spoken by God himself. Most of the text of Scripture does not signify in this manner, and some of it has direct reference to man as the speaker, as has been seen previously. But nonetheless it is necessary to say that the whole of Scripture is the word of God in this sense. Scripture is not the eternal Word of the Father, and it will shortly be shown that Scripture is not the word of God in any of the other senses besides the one considered here. It will then be necessary to return to the problem of Scripture's manner of signifying the divine understanding.

The third kind of word is the imagination of the word to be spoken. In order to speak one must first imagine the words to be spoken. This cannot exist in God properly because God does not have an imagination, since the imagination is a power present in a bodily organ. But St. Thomas says that it exists in God metaphorically, and thus God's ideas of things to be created are called words. The first chapter of Genesis offers examples of this usage. "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light."¹⁷⁵ God's word in this example is not a created being, but his own idea of the thing to be made. The words of Scripture are not words of God in this sense, because the words of Scripture are created beings, while words in this sense are uncreated ideas.

Fourth, the thing effected or signified by a word is called a word. This usage is metaphorical even in earthly matters. If someone points to some result and says, 'This is what I said,' the meaning is 'This was signified by what I said.' Similarly, in the Lord's prayer, when we say, 'Thy will be done,' we mean, 'May the thing signified by thy command be done.'¹⁷⁶ In this sense all created things could be called the word of God insofar as they are effected by and expressed in the divine Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."¹⁷⁷ Thus all created things are the *effect* of the divine Word, and are *expressed in* the divine Word. "Because God in one act understands both himself and all things, his single Word is expressive not only of the Father, but also of creatures."¹⁷⁸

Scripture is the word of God in this sense insofar as it is part of creation, but one cannot say that some parts of Scripture are the word of God in this sense alone. Something is a word of God in this

¹⁷² Matthew 3:17.

¹⁷³ Jeremiah 32:26.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *De Veritate*, 12; *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 171-174.

¹⁷⁵ Genesis 1:3.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 83, 9, ad 1.

¹⁷⁷ John 1:1-3.

¹⁷⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 34, 3, corp.

sense not because it *signifies* the divine understanding, but because it is the *effect* of the divine understanding. But this is true of all created things, as was said above. Thus if Scripture or parts of Scripture are the word of God in this sense alone, one must conclude with Loisy that Scripture or parts of Scripture have no special authority whatsoever, and are not more the word of God than any other words, or even than anything else. But this is clearly incompatible with a Christian understanding of Scripture. Thus it is necessary to say that Scripture is the word of God in the second of the four senses discussed, since the other three have been excluded. It is necessary to insist on this because one might be tempted to deny that certain parts of Scripture express the mind of God in order to resolve difficulties or in order to account for the manner of expression used in Scripture.

Scripture is therefore the word of God in the sense that it is a written word produced by God with the purpose of signifying and communicating something present in his understanding. Now the two problems raised above can be resolved. First the human manner of expression found in Scripture will be considered, and then the objection that the human author of Scripture could make a false statement without God saying anything false. Now, God does not speak words in a bodily manner as men do, and so words signify his thought in various ways depending on the way in which his words are produced. Sometimes his words are produced as if from his own person. “Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I [the Father] have glorified it [the name of the Father], and I will glorify it again.’”¹⁷⁹ In this case the voice from heaven is not produced in a bodily manner, but it expresses the mind of God in the same way that a man would express his mind if he spoke these words.

At other times God expresses himself in other ways. An example of this can be found in the conversation between Balaam and his donkey.

Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Balaam, “What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?” Balaam said to the donkey, “Because you have made a fool of me! I wish I had a sword in my hand! I would kill you right now!” But the donkey said to Balaam, “Am I not your donkey, which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I been in the habit of treating you this way?” And he said, “No.”¹⁸⁰

In this passage it is God who “opened the mouth of the donkey.” Nonetheless the words are attributed to the donkey, and the donkey refers to itself as Balaam’s donkey. But if one considers this example, it is necessary to say that the words of the donkey are more truly the words of God. The donkey is an irrational animal, and has no thought to express. Thus the thought expressed in the words of the donkey can only be God’s thought, since God is the one responsible for the words. But the donkey’s words signify God’s thought in the particular manner proper to the situation. The words are produced as proceeding from the donkey, and thus signify in the corresponding manner. When the donkey refers to itself as Balaam’s donkey, this shows neither that the donkey knows that it is Balaam’s donkey, since it knows nothing, nor that God calls himself a donkey, but rather that God knows that the donkey is Balaam’s. Thus the mode of signification of the words is taken from the fact that the words proceed from the donkey, while the mind expressing itself in the words is the mind of God.

Now, Scripture is not only the word of God, but it was also written by men. St. Augustine combines these two elements. “And in reading it [Scripture], men seek nothing more than to find out the thought and will of those by whom it was written, and through these to find out the will of God, in accordance with which they believe these men to have spoken.”¹⁸¹ The meaning of this is that Scripture is not *only* the words of God expressing something of his understanding, but also

¹⁷⁹ John 12:28.

¹⁸⁰ Numbers 22:28-30.

¹⁸¹ *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 5, in NPNF, 1st Series, 2:536-537.

human words expressing men's understanding, that is, that men and God are authors of the same written work as communicating a certain understanding. It follows from this that Scripture receives its *mode of signifying* from the men writing it, just as the speech of Balaam's donkey received its mode from the fact that the words were produced as proceeding from the donkey. Nonetheless the *thought* expressed in Scripture is the divine thought, as the thought expressed in the words of the donkey is the divine thought. Thus it is not necessary to limit the claim that Scripture is the word of God in order to understand how it can be written in a human manner.

Next it is necessary to resolve the problem that Scripture might be false insofar as it is from man but true insofar as it is from God. Scripture was not written by one man alone, but by many men. The four Gospels, for example, were not written by one and the same man, but by several men. Each man was therefore an author of a part of Scripture rather than the whole. Now, there are some things belonging to part of a written work precisely insofar as it is a part of a greater whole. For example, the conclusion of an argument cannot stand alone, but it is a conclusion only by following from the argument. It therefore follows that someone cannot be an author of a conclusion *as* a conclusion unless he understands the argument and sets down the conclusion as following from the argument. Similarly, the subject of a sentence is a subject only in relation to the rest of the sentence. With respect to such matters none of the human authors of Scripture is a perfect author, because none perfectly understands the whole of Scripture. God alone is the perfect author of Scripture with respect to these things. The human author might even be able to make mistakes with respect to the larger framework, because this would not seem to prevent his true authorship of the substance of the part, but only of the part *as* a part.¹⁸² This would not involve a false statement, for reasons to be given below.

There are other things belonging to a text as a whole, even if the text is a part of something larger. For example, the conclusion of an argument is a certain statement, even without the consideration that it is a conclusion, and this belongs to it as itself a whole. Similarly, the subject of a sentence signifies something as a whole word or phrase, even without the consideration that it is the subject of a sentence.

With respect to these matters, a human author of Scripture may be a perfect author, since he might understand the whole of which he is an author. But it cannot be said that it is necessary that he should understand the whole, because the human author is a deficient instrument: "Because the mind of the prophet is a deficient instrument... even true prophets do not know all the things which the Holy Spirit intends in their visions, words, or deeds."¹⁸³ Thus the human author may not know everything which belongs to his text even insofar as it is itself a whole. But even if he does not understand all, it is impossible that anything should belong to his text as a whole in itself that does not belong to his text when it is understood as a part of the larger whole. The reason for this is that he would not only not be an author of the part as part, but he would no longer be an author of even the substance of the part. For example, if the subject of a sentence has one meaning as an individual word, but does not have this meaning when it is part of a sentence, then one who is an author of the individual word is not strictly speaking the author of any part of the sentence. If someone writes the word 'bat', intending to signify a flying creature, and another man adds to his word in order to complete a sentence, but intending to use this word in order to signify a wooden stick, the first writer is an author of no part of the sentence except materially. That is to say, he is not the author of a word, something signifying understanding, but he is only the author of matter which can be used in order to signify. But it was said that both the human and divine authors of Scripture are authors of it insofar as it is significant. Thus it follows that nothing belongs to the whole of which a man is the author which is not present when his text is understood as a part of a greater whole.

¹⁸² To a certain degree the human author must be able to make such an error. For example, if one author inserts something into the text of a previous author, the intentions of the first author with respect to the division of the text can no longer carry their full force, since the original divisions do not allow for the inserted text. Thus whenever a book of Scripture has more than one author in such a way, it follows that some such intentions of the original author are revoked in the final form of the text of Scripture.

¹⁸³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 173, 4, corp.

From the distinction between things pertaining to a part as a part and things pertaining to a part as a whole in itself, it follows that if assertion pertains to a sentence only insofar as it is part of a larger text, the human author might be able to assert something false without God asserting something false. But assertion and denial belong to sentences as wholes, not only to sentences as parts of a larger text. This can be seen in the example of the conclusion of an argument. If a conclusion is considered apart from the argument, it does not remain a conclusion. But it remains a statement asserting a certain truth. Thus assertion pertains to a sentence as a whole in itself.

But what pertains to the part insofar as it is a certain whole remains even when the part is understood in relation to a greater whole, as was said above. Thus it follows that whatever is asserted by the human author of a particular sentence must be understood to be asserted by the sentence even when it is taken as a part of the whole of Scripture. From this it follows that whatever is asserted by the human authors of Scripture is asserted by God, who is the author of the whole of Scripture.

It therefore follows that if the human author of Scripture asserts something false, then God asserts something false. But this is impossible. Therefore it is impossible that the human author should assert something false in any part of Scripture. Thus the difficulty raised above has been resolved.

In one sense the question of this work has now been sufficiently resolved, since it has been shown that it is necessary to hold that Scripture is free from error both from the Church's tradition and by the use of reason. Now, some object not only to the doctrine itself, but also to manner in which the doctrine is considered. This objection should therefore be answered before going on to consider opposing positions. The objection is clearly expressed by Burtchaell:

Yet throughout our period conciliar documents have been revered with mystic adulation. Like papal documents they have been expected to release arcane reserves of decisive insight; and like papal documents they have not been dispassionately evaluated or criticized.

What I question here is the fetish that theologians have made of authority. They have done the same with the classic dicta of the schools. Some have relied uncritically on the axiom: *Deus est auctor Sacrae Scripturae*. Others have found it better to build upon Aquinas' medieval psychology. Scholars have voyaged over all seas in search of any small islet of authority upon which to unfurl their syllogisms. They have meanwhile turned their backs on the one solid fact close at hand: the Bible itself. Most inspiration theory has not been talk about the Bible. It has been talk about talk about the Bible. Rather than examine the Book itself, and observe what it has meant to the Church, and how it may have been produced to this end, they have preferred to erect elaborate and rickety constructs of formula upon formula—all based on faultless authorities, but none very illuminating, none to the point.

It is possibly this hyperfascination with authority that has led scholars to follow a priori methods of argumentation. Some have discussed the ultimate cause, God, and pondered how he would have to have behaved had he wished to embark upon a career as author. Others have looked at the proximate cause, the human writers, to find out how men write and what God must have done to govern their composition. But the proper methodology for investigatory theology should move from effect to cause, from better-known to lesser-known. Advance would begin more surely and rapidly from the Book itself.¹⁸⁴

There are two criticisms here. First, says Burtchaell, one ought not to base oneself on authorities concerning Scripture, but rather on Scripture itself. Second he says that one should not use "a priori methods of argumentation." In context this seems to mean that one should not make universal

¹⁸⁴ Burtchaell, 283-284.

arguments about the nature of Scripture, but one should make judgements from the text of Scripture itself. Thus Burtchaell calls into question the entire method of this work.

The answer to the first objection is that it belongs to the nature of authority that it should be received as authoritative. Therefore to say that one should not submit to authority is simply to deny the existence of authority. But as theology is a science received from divine revelation, it must be received on the authority of God and on the authority of those men who communicate what is divinely revealed.¹⁸⁵ But this objection implicitly maintains that such authority does not exist. Therefore it must also hold that theology and divine revelation do not exist. But to prove the existence of divine revelation does not pertain to the subject of this work, but this existence is presupposed to the whole discussion. Because the fullness of this revelation exists in the Catholic Church, the same answer holds if the objection is taken as rejecting the authority of the Catholic Church alone, rather than authority in general.

The second objection, even if it were a valid objection, would not be sufficient to establish anything against arguments such as those contained in this work. If someone begins from an inappropriate starting point, he is likely to fall into error, but it is not necessary that all of his arguments should be invalid. Thus, even if it were true that it is better to begin from Scripture itself, universal arguments such as ours would have to be addressed individually.

But at least with respect to the particular issue treated in this work, universal considerations are the right beginning, while it would be a mistake to try to resolve the issue from Scripture itself. The examination of Scripture could not prove that all of its statements are true, since some of its statements are known to be true from Scripture alone. One might establish the opposite by taking one particular statement of Scripture and showing that it was false. But for various reasons this kind of proof is not conclusive.¹⁸⁶ In each particular case, the text might be corrupt or misunderstood. Even those who assert that there are errors do not attempt to prove this by a single example alone, which indicates that they do not think they can give a perfectly certain example of a statement certainly false. The actual use of particular objections will be discussed in more detail when the objections to the doctrine are considered.

Nor can the question be resolved by considering the visible character of Scripture. It will be shown later that one of the consequences of the doctrine of inspiration is that the text of Scripture must have general characteristics similar to those in a text containing errors. To argue from its visible character to the existence of errors in Scripture is therefore like arguing that Christ is not present in the Eucharist on the grounds that the Eucharist can be seen to be bread. For the same reason one cannot establish the doctrine of inerrancy from such visible characteristics of Scripture, any more than Christ's presence in the Eucharist can be established by the senses.¹⁸⁷ It is therefore necessary to resolve the question by means of universal arguments such as those contained in this work, rather than by arguments depending on particulars of the text of Scripture. Thus the objection concerning the manner of treating the doctrine has been answered.

b. Opposing positions

Next it is necessary to consider opposing positions. In the words of Leo XIII, those who deny the inerrancy of Scripture "either pervert the Catholic notion of inspiration or make God the author of such error."¹⁸⁸ It does not seem that any man of good sense wishes to hold a position making God

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 8, ad 2.

¹⁸⁶ The most basic reason that this cannot be done is that there are no false statements in Scripture, as has been shown above.

¹⁸⁷ The two doctrines are not entirely equivalent in this regard. The doctrine of the Real Presence can be shown in no way by the use of the senses, while the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture cannot be established by the appearances, but in a certain way it can be defended by the appearances, as will be seen later.

¹⁸⁸ *Providentissimus Deus*, 27.

the author of error, and such a position is intrinsically impossible because it makes truth itself the source of falsehood. Thus it is only necessary to consider the positions that “pervert the Catholic notion of inspiration.” It was shown above that the inerrancy of Scripture follows from the doctrine that both men and God are true authors of Scripture. Thus, one who denies inerrancy must deny either that men are authors of Scripture or that God is the author. First the position denying that men are authors will be considered, and then the position denying that God is the author. In each case an example of the position in question will be given, and then the general problems of such a position.

Norbert Lohfink holds a position implicitly denying the human authorship of Scripture. As has been stated in the first part of this work, Lohfink maintains that Scripture is inerrant considered as a whole, but the particular books and the particular authors are not inerrant.

An example of this [the limitations of form criticism] is the creation text in Genesis 1. It has been said that on the basis of its literary category, this text is only concerned with a single statement, that God created everything. Anyone who is making a judicious use of form criticism would probably be more cautious here. Does not the category here also intend to imply a further statement with regard to the creation itself, its structure and construction? The statement that Genesis 1 is merely concerned to state the fact of the creation is only true within the horizon of the Bible as a whole. There different world views are juxtaposed and render each other more relative. On the basis of the principal emphasis of the Gospel as they are laid down in the New Testament, it is in fact only the statement that God created everything which is at issue, so that one can rightly regard this alone as inerrant, and not also the statements which describe the form of the universe in Genesis 1.¹⁸⁹

Here Lohfink presupposes that Genesis 1 contains false statements concerning the form of the world, but that considered as a part of the whole Bible, it only asserts that God created the world. The human author asserted something false when he wrote the text, but God asserted something true, that God is the Creator, by causing later authors to oppose the author of Genesis.

Lohfink’s argument has several steps. First he says that many or most of the books of Scripture have many authors.

In the meantime, the picture of the great writer-personality who wrote a work in one single draft has proved itself to be untenable in many cases. In the world of the ancient Near East it is the exception, and so it is in the Bible. The Pentateuch was worked on for fully 700 years, from Moses onward. Our books of the prophets were, before their acceptance into the canon, the sacred books of esoteric circles of disciples of the prophets, which were constantly being enlarged, commented upon and even altered with regard to their message.¹⁹⁰

Lohfink’s claim is that the books of Scripture have many authors. He also seems to suggest, by the phrases “worked on for fully 700 years” and “constantly being enlarged,” that the authors are practically innumerable, which does not seem to be a very credible position. But in any case, it is not necessary to determine the truth or falsehood of either the claim or the suggestion, because it will be shown that the conclusions that Lohfink draws from this statement do not follow. His first conclusion is that in light of the existence of many authors of each book of Scripture it is necessary to find a new formula to express the inerrancy of Scripture.

¹⁸⁹ *The Inerrancy of Scripture*, 47.

¹⁹⁰ Lohfink, 28.

The consequence was that in the light of the new knowledge, the old formula of the “inerrancy of the sacred writers” no longer meant the same as that of the “inerrancy of the books of the Bible,” but far more. Not only the individual book in its final form and content had now to be considered as inerrant, but also every individual phase in its growth, a process that was admitted to be complicated and lengthy, for each stage corresponded to the intention of an “inerrant sacred writer” as he wrote. Each time the book was lengthened, added to, glossed, commented upon, combined with other texts or adapted to a new situation, a new and inerrant total statement of the book came into being.... Thus in the light of our new knowledge of the way the scriptures come into being, the retention of the formula “the inerrancy of the sacred writers” at once takes on a new doctrinal content... Anyone who regards the early stages of the biblical books as being free from error must in fact accept all the statements contained in them as the object of his belief as well.... It is therefore necessary to attempt to state the old truth in a new way, simply in order to maintain it as it was.¹⁹¹

Here Lohfink misunderstands the meaning of the phrase “inerrant sacred writer.” But this will become clearer after considering his possible restatements of the doctrine.

One might simply regard the last man who had worked on a biblical book in the course of its gradual evolution as the “inspired author” in the sense understood by the doctrine of inspiration. All earlier stages in the book would then be characterized as “sources.” Their authors would not be seen as having the charisma of inspiration, and so there would be no valid reason for regarding them as inerrant.... This solution of the problem definitely does not contradict the positive doctrinal demand of ecclesiastical documents, although it departs in this from the underlying conceptions and from the language found, for example, in papal biblical encyclicals. One might nevertheless ask whether this solution does not somewhat neglect others who worked on a book of the Bible, and who did not have the good fortune to be the very last hand to touch it.¹⁹²

Once again Lohfink suggests without proof that the authors are innumerable, in virtue of the phrases “gradual evolution” and “the very last hand to touch it.” It may well be that the very last man who touched a biblical book basically wrote it entirely himself, in which case it would not seem so strange to call him the one and only inspired author of the book. But Lohfink’s position can be granted for the sake of argument. It will be shown that this does not make it necessary to modify the doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy. Because the position that the final author alone is inspired seems to be unacceptable, Lohfink offers another possibility:

It [the second solution] is based on the idea that everyone who has made a real contribution to the wording and sense of a book of the Bible should be regarded as being infallibly guided by God with regard to the future book, that is to say, as being “inspired.” One would then have to speak of a number of inspired authors, with regard to a book which came gradually into being. The inspiration of these authors, therefore, did not relate to their immediate work, considered in itself, but to that work insofar as it was directed by God, in wording and sense, toward the ultimate biblical book. Thus the inerrancy consequent upon the inspiration could not be predicated directly of all the individuals who worked on the book and their particular intention, but only upon the book which finally resulted.... One could hardly say that this attempt at a solution was not logically sound or that it was not compatible with a true understanding of the

¹⁹¹ Lohfink, 29-30.

¹⁹² Lohfink, 30.

concept of inspiration. It does not detract in the slightest either from the influence of God or from the inerrancy of the final product (*omnis sensus omniumque sententiarum* of the books of the Bible, in the words of *Spiritus Paraclitus*, 1920).¹⁹³

In some ways this solution seems much more reasonable than the first solution. God guides many writers in such a way that in the end he produces the book he wants written, but the authors are not inerrant with respect to the abandoned stages, but only with respect to the final product.

But in the words of Leo XIII, this solution “perverts the Catholic understanding of inspiration.” The reason for this is that it says that the earlier authors were inspired because God guided their activity according to his purpose of producing the final book. He did not guide the earlier authors in the sense of producing their words as his own words. The things written in the earlier stages are not things that God said. But only words caused by God in order to signify his own understanding are inspired, and so these earlier stages cannot be called inspired, but only guided and caused by God.

From this one might conclude that it is necessary to revert to the first solution, but this does not follow. The reason for this is that even in the earlier stages the authors might have made a real contribution to the final work. Insofar as each author is an author of something contained in the final product, he must be said to be producing God’s word, and therefore to be inspired. Thus it is necessary to say that the earlier authors are inspired with respect to everything contained within the final work, and not inspired with respect to everything not contained within the final work, although they are guided and moved by God even with respect to such things.¹⁹⁴ Thus it becomes evident that it is not necessary to change the formula “inerrant sacred writers.” The writers are inerrant insofar as they are sacred, that is, insofar as they write the word of God. No one claims that the sacred writers are inerrant in everything they write, but only in what they write of Scripture.

Thus, once inspiration has been correctly understood, Lohfink’s second solution of the problem becomes reasonable, but it no longer requires any modification of the traditional statement of the doctrine. Lohfink’s conclusion, “it seems advisable in any case to allow the formula of the ‘inerrancy of the sacred writers’ to recede into the background,”¹⁹⁵ therefore does not follow.

But this is not Lohfink’s final conclusion. He takes one more step.

Hitherto, the terms “final author” and “final sense of a biblical book” were treated as established and familiar entities. This, however, is no longer so. In the definition of the relationship between “the books of the Bible” and the Bible as a whole, our conception has altered here again as a result of the products of historical and critical scholarship.... First, let us consider once again the framework of the understanding of earlier generations, and try to see how they could legitimately assert the biblical inerrancy of every individual book. The theory was that each of the outstanding personalities who were the sacred writers has written his book (or his books) at a given time. Once such a book had been composed, it was published, and once it was made public, then it was a fixed, unchangeable entity—as was the case with books in the nineteenth century.... Thus, according to the views of that period, books of the Bible which already had been accepted into the canon remained the same when another book was taken into the canon. They said exactly the same thing as before. They had long received their final form....

This static conception of the canon has undergone a crisis. Even the compilation of the canon is increasingly seen, from the point of view of historical criticism, as an evolutionary process. The boundary between the history of the formation of individual books and the history of the canon becomes less distinct. The growth of the canon

¹⁹³ Lohfink, 30-31.

¹⁹⁴ As was said before, all things are subject to the providence of God, and so such subjection is not a sufficient reason for calling anything inspired. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I, 22, 2.

¹⁹⁵ Lohfink, 33.

seems to be no more than a further stage, somewhat different in form, of the process which brought the individual books into being.... Between the alternation and interweaving of the Yahwist, Elohist, and priestly writings within a single "book," and the alternation and juxtaposition of the historical works of the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler within the "canon" there is no real practical difference. In both cases different versions of history are associated, complement and correct each other, and constitute together a new and higher unity of utterance. The same is true, within the canon, of the wisdom books. They complement and criticize each other, and at the same time, as a unity within an even greater whole, they form a counterpoint to the Torah and the prophets.¹⁹⁶

The old position was that the meaning of the individual books of Scripture was fixed when the books were completed. But, says Lohfink, it is now known that the meaning of the books changed when they were taken into the canon together with other books. Thus it is evident that Lohfink's position necessitates a denial of the human authorship of Scripture. If the meaning of the books changed, it was not men who changed the meaning. When a man took the Torah and added the prophets or the wisdom books, he did not go over the Torah and decide on a new meaning for its statements. If a new meaning came to be, it was a meaning given by God but not by men. Thus this position destroys the nature of inspiration by denying the true human authorship of the books of Scripture.¹⁹⁷

But this position is impossible even without reference to the demand of the faith that men are true authors of Scripture. When a man takes several books or essays and publishes them together, this never changes the meaning of the individual books or essays. The reason for the selection may well be that a new understanding can arise from reading the whole collection. If some of the works present false views and others true views, one might come to see the truth of the correct views by reason of the contrast with the false. If some of the works contain a mixture of truth and error, one might distinguish these portions by considering the other works. In many other ways it can be beneficial to read several works together. But in no case does the meaning of an individual work change by being placed together with other works, even if the understanding that one can gather from the whole collection goes beyond the contents of any individual work.

Lohfink's position also requires that the Old Testament was not the word of God, since it had not yet achieved its ultimate meaning by being joined with the New Testament. Thus he says, "In any case, it is not possible to claim inerrancy for a transitory layer of meaning in the Old Testament in the name of the Christian doctrine of the inerrancy of the Christian Bible."¹⁹⁸ He does not say that the Old Testament was not the word of God, but this is the necessary consequence of his position, since he holds that the ultimate meaning of the words is the one intended by God. This is

¹⁹⁶ Lohfink, 33-35.

¹⁹⁷ Raymond Brown holds a similar position, but his position goes a bit further. After making similar statements about a development in Scripture's meaning on account of the formation of the canon, he states, "But even the placing of a book in the Bible does not tell us fully about its meaning. For this Bible to be normative for Christian life, it has to be accepted by the Church and proclaimed as part of a living tradition in the community of believers. 'Biblical meaning' is not simply what a passage meant to the author who wrote it (literal meaning), or what it meant to those who first accepted it into a normative collection (canonical meaning); biblical meaning is also what the passage means today in the context of the Christian Church. And when one speaks of the Bible 'teaching without error that truth which God put into the Scripture for the sake of our salvation,' one is speaking of biblical meaning as a whole and not of an isolated stage of that meaning" (*The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 20). Thus if there is any the inerrant sense, according to Brown, it is even more remote from the text. It is a sense imposed on the text from without. The problems with this position are basically equivalent to the problems with Lohfink's position, but with the additional problem that according to this position, God did *not* put truth "into the Scripture for the sake of our salvation."

¹⁹⁸ Lohfink, 41.

clearly opposed to the practice of Christ and of the Apostles who used the Old Testament as already possessing the decisively authoritative character of Sacred Scripture.

But perhaps Lohfink's position would be more reasonable if he abandoned the position that placing a written work together with other works changes its meaning. As soon as any part of the text of Scripture is written in its final form, he might say, it possesses the meaning intended by God, although this meaning is unknown to the human writer. For something to be written in this way is not impossible. When Caiphas said, "You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed,"¹⁹⁹ he spoke in this manner. He intended to say that it was better to kill Christ than to allow the Romans to "destroy" the Jewish nation. This statement is evidently false, but God intended to say that it was better that men might be saved through the passion and death of Christ than that all men should be lost. Thus Caiphas was the author of a false statement, not of the prediction that Christ would die for the human race. "From which it is evident that he cannot be more called a prophet than Balaam's donkey."²⁰⁰ Thus it is not impossible for a man to speak or write something by which God expresses a truth, even if the speaker or writer does not understand the truth expressed. But such a speaker or writer is not a true author. "But when [a prophet] is moved [to say something], but does not know [the meaning of what he says], this is not perfect prophecy, but a certain prophetic instinct."²⁰¹

The position that Scripture expresses truth in this way is Lohfink's position, but understood more generally, since Lohfink's position taken concretely has additional difficulties, as shown above. If the position is considered in its general terms, however, there are three problems with the position. First, the denial of human authorship derogates from the excellence of God's providence. God wishes to communicate to creatures not only his goodness, but also a participation in his causality. St. Thomas therefore says that God "governs inferior things by superior things, not on account of a defect of his power, but on account of the abundance of his goodness, that he might communicate to creatures even the dignity of causality."²⁰² Just as it is better if fire receives from God the power to heat than if God alone causes heat, so it is better if men receive true authorship of the words of God than if this authorship is reserved to God alone.

Second, the purpose of the position seems to be to deny God's responsibility for flaws in the text of Scripture, but this position cannot succeed in this purpose. If there seems to be some defect or error in Scripture, this position says that it might be a defect or an error insofar as it has one meaning from man, but it is not defective insofar as it has another meaning from God. But if one is to hold this, one must show that it is reasonable to say that this text has the meaning that one attributes to God's authority. But if one can show that this is reasonable, then it will also be reasonable to attribute the same sense to human authority. The reason for this is that the meaning of a text must fit into its immediate context, and not only into something more general. For example, Lohfink's suggestion that the human author of Genesis said something false, but that God only meant to say that he created everything, cannot be correct. Lohfink determines that this was God's meaning by comparing the text with other parts of Scripture and concluding that God does not really hold that the world was created in six days, for example. But in fact one could not conclude from this that the six-day creation was not the meaning of the text in Genesis, but rather that the text in Genesis was a divine lie. If one determines from what someone says in one place that he does not believe what he says in another place, it does not follow that he did not mean what he said, but that he lied, or that he was uncertain or ignorant. The only way that one can determine that he meant something else is by showing that his words *as* words are able to mean something else. But if one shows from the text of Genesis that it does not necessarily assert that God made the world in six days, then there is no longer any necessary reason to think that the man who wrote it asserted

¹⁹⁹ John 11:50.

²⁰⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Evangelium S. Joannis Commentaria* (Rome: Marietti, 1919), cap. 11, lect. 7.

²⁰¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 173, 4, corp.

²⁰² *Summa Theologiae* I, 22, 3, corp.

this.²⁰³ One might go on to object that this answer requires that the human authors should have been practically omniscient, since it seems that in order to avoid all historical and scientific inaccuracy the human authors must have known all the historical and scientific details. But later it will be shown that if one says that the human authors were omniscient, then it follows that they were liars or deceptive, while it is reasonable to hold that they spoke the truth precisely because one holds that they did not know all things. From this the problem regarding God's responsibility becomes even greater. If God is the sole author of Scripture, then one must hold him responsible for apparent defects and errors. Thus the position denying human authorship does not absolve God of responsibility for defects in Scripture, but rather makes him entirely responsible, because it makes him the sole author.

The third problem with this position is that it must deny the usefulness of considering the intention of the men who wrote Scripture. This can be shown from a passage in which Lohfink asserts the contrary.

Even the tracts on hermeneutics which are normally in use observe, in their discussion of such problems [as in Qoheleth], that the texts of the Bible must naturally be read in the light of tradition or of the faith of the Church. Are they not aware that by so doing they have already abandoned in many cases the view that in the Old Testament it is the original sense which is inerrant? Or do they wish to assert in every case that it is the historical and critical interpretation of the text which is in error, and that, for example, Qoheleth sought throughout to say what critical scholars have only found in later books of the Old Testament and in the New Testament? We hope not; for this would imply a mistrust of modern methods of Biblical scholarship which since *Divino afflante Spiritu* is hardly permissible.²⁰⁴

Lohfink wishes to say that the original sense of the text of Qoheleth asserts something false, such as that the human soul does not exist after death, or something of this kind. But when one reads the text within the faith of the Church the text does not have this meaning. But if historical methods only give rise to the interpretation which says that the text means something false, then one should not use these methods, since this is not the meaning intended by God. If one wishes to hold that one should use such methods, and also that one should read Scripture within the faith of the Church, then one must say that the meaning of the original author is the same as the meaning when the text is read within the faith of the Church. Nor does this imply distrust of historical methods, but only of certain conclusions of certain scholars, conclusions not given authority by *Divino afflante Spiritu*.²⁰⁵ Thus, if a Catholic denies that the meaning of the original sense of Scripture is the same as its sense when it is read within the faith of the Church, then he must deny the usefulness of considering the original sense.

Next it is necessary to consider a position accepting the human authorship of Scripture, but denying the authorship of God. This is implicit in the position that Grillmeier suggests, perhaps not holding to it with certainty. First he presents a suggestion of Pierre Grelot.

He [Grelot] starts practically from the idea of *salutis causa* and says that in Scripture not only are truths of salvation communicated as “a material object”, but that “the communication of saving truths” is the whole “formal object” of Scripture. Thus the so-called secular truths or narratives also acquire through this a relation to salvation. They are chosen and presented not as saving truths in themselves, but as the medium

²⁰³ See *Summa Theologiae*, I, 65-74 for several suggestions concerning the meaning of the six days.

²⁰⁴ Lohfink, 46.

²⁰⁵ Lohfink's appeal to the authority of this encyclical is somewhat odd, given that he rejects a major element in its teaching, the inerrancy of the original sense. The authority of the encyclical can in fact be used against such conclusions insofar as it rejects falsehood in the original sense.

of the communication of salvation. They serve as a framework to what is essential, “locating” saving truth and the history of salvation (cf. e.g. Dan. 1 or Lk. 1). They are chosen and presented only in so far as they fulfill this purpose.²⁰⁶

Grelot distinguishes between the goal of communicating saving truths and other statements in Scripture, which are for the sake of the goal.²⁰⁷ Grillmeier then states what he believes to be the consequence of this distinction:

In the light of the *salutis causa* we can see Scripture as a complex entity with many levels—analogous to the way in which the Church as a whole saw itself at the Council. There are direct statements and accounts of salvation in which this formal object *salutis causa* is clearly verifiable. But there are also parts of Scripture which have only an auxiliary function in relation to these direct truths of salvation. Here, from the point of view of the secular sciences, somewhat less than the truth can be expressed. The question of inerrancy is not to become a matter of a bad conscience or false attitudes but should open one’s eyes to the full nature of Scripture. God’s word communicates itself to us unfalsified in the fragile vessel of human language and human writing. God’s purpose is that his word of salvation is received in all its fullness. To it he gives the guarantee of full authority. This is the true meaning of inspiration, the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Everything else only serves the truth that is written down without error “for the sake of our salvation”. It is a means or framework of the statement that is actually intended and thus only has a part-share in inerrancy, namely to the extent required in its service of the saving word. Thus one can accept inerrancy in a true sense of the whole of Scripture, as inspiration also applies to all the books and their parts. Everything in Scripture has a share in the “truth that God wanted to have written down for the sake of our salvation”, either directly and in content or indirectly and by reason of its service for the statement of salvation.²⁰⁸

Grillmeier’s position as stated here is that by inspiration the sacred writer is assisted so that saving truths themselves are inerrant, while what he writes for the sake of this truth is not simply inerrant, but only insofar as this is necessary for the sake of the saving truth. This position therefore accepts the possibility of false statements in Scripture, which are said to be useful for the communication of the truth of salvation. This position implicitly denies that God is the author of Scripture, because it is impossible that God should say anything false, even for the sake of something good. But this denial is only implicit, because Grillmeier explicitly states the opposite:

The truth of Scripture is bound up with what the sacred writer or writers intended to convey, in which what God desired to convey expresses itself. This point is important primarily for the understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. The Church is not committing itself to the idea of a verbal inspiration that can be understood more or less “mechanically”. The truth of Scripture is contained in meanings that have first to be discovered in the single words and sentences. This gives to the idea of inspiration

²⁰⁶ Grillmeier, 235.

²⁰⁷ The purpose of Grelot’s distinction is to defend the inerrancy of Scripture while explaining the presence of difficulties in the text of Scripture. Thus Grelot says, “Our approach to the sacred books, not only in their divine reality, but in their human peculiarities, will give us a correct understanding of the *truth* of the Bible. Inspiring the sacred authors, God assumed the primary responsibility and the guarantee for their writings. He would not teach error. And since his teaching passes through the channel of an inspired man, we must accept in faith all that *the man affirms as true*” (*Introduction to the Bible*, 400). Grelot wishes to use his distinction to defend this truth, while Grillmeier has the opposite intention. It will be seen below that the distinction is more useful for Grelot’s purpose.

²⁰⁸ Grillmeier, 236.

itself a new depth and a particular relation to the revelation of salvation. However much the Church's understanding of inspiration is related to the "written" word and Scripture is, through this inspiration, "the written word of God", it is not the letter or the sentence, but the intention of the sacred writers that decides the meaning of Scripture. But because of inspiration what they desire to express is the same as what God desires to express. Because, however, the statement of God, according to Article 11, is a statement of salvation, the *salutis causa* is the formal point of view from which the sacred writers compose their writings. Hence even after *Dei Verbum*—as in *Divino afflante*—the truth of Scripture and inerrancy is bound up with what the sacred writers desired to express. It is not separated from this. We have shown how the so-called *veritates profanae* are also included, though in their own way. Thus Scripture becomes—despite all its humanity and its conditioning by the age in which it was written—God's address to us in the human word, *propter salutem nostram*!²⁰⁹

Here Grillmeier says that Scripture is the written word of God and God's address to us. But he also says that what the sacred writer desired to express is the same as what God desired to express. Now, if the sacred writer desired at times to express what is in fact false, then it follows from this that God desired to express what is false, and thus God becomes a liar. Clearly this is a consequence that Grillmeier does not wish to accept. But this conclusion can be rejected only if God's authorship is denied, although Grillmeier does not see the necessity of this, as is evident in the following passage.

The Council leaves it to theologians to consider, on the basis of the history of the text, the nature of the cooperation of the divine authorship or influence with the human literary authorship. It is possible to ask whether the new nuances in the account of the divine and the human share in the writing of the books allow one to give a new account of the nature, goal and effect of the divine influence and then to describe the human share in the writing of the books in such a way that God retains, in relation to them, his true authorship—and yet does not have the limitations of these authors laid to his account, whether in the form of the narrative or in its contents; in the latter it is a question of what they are contributing from the purely human, secular sphere and hence by their own powers.²¹⁰

The reason for the contrast of "divine authorship" with "human literary authorship" is the suggestion that the words of Scripture might be the words of men, with God as author only in the sense that he is the first cause, who produced this text with a certain intention. The question, "does God retain true authorship," asks whether it is possible in some way to continue to hold that the words of Scripture are words of God. Grillmeier holds that this is possible, and asserts this in the text quoted above. But this position makes God a liar. If one is to hold such a position consistently and without making God the author of error, it is necessary to say that men are the sole authors of Scripture, while God is the cause of Scripture with a certain intention. This intention is that the truth of salvation should be communicated to men, and thus statements conveying this truth are inerrant, while other statements are inerrant insofar as this is necessary in order to convey the truth of salvation. According to this view inspiration is merely an assistance assuring the truth of certain things, but not of others. This kind of writing is not the word of God, but is not in itself impossible. God assists the Church in its decisions in such a way that it is infallible with respect to some things, and not infallible with respect to others. Similarly, the documents of the Church's teaching office, even when infallible, never become the word of God.

²⁰⁹ Grillmeier, 238.

²¹⁰ Grillmeier, 230.

In addition to its contrariety with the faith of the Church, this kind of position has two problems. The first is that this position derogates from the excellence of God's providence even more than positions denying the human authorship of Scripture. St. Thomas says that there are two effects of the divine government.

In another way, the effects of governing can be considered according to the things by which a creature is brought to likeness with God. And thus in general there are two effects of governing. For a creature is likened to God with respect to two things, namely with respect to this that God is good, insofar as the creature is good, and with respect to this that God is a cause of goodness for others, insofar as one creature moves another to goodness.²¹¹

The positions denying human authorship deny causality of the word of God to man insofar as it is a word, but leave room for a material causality, thus derogating from God's providence insofar as it makes some things causes of other things. But the positions denying divine authorship deny the existence of the word of God entirely, thus also denying all causality of the word of God, and therefore derogating from God's providence both insofar as it is a cause of good things and insofar as it communicates causality.

The second problem with this position is that it implicitly denies that Scripture has any authority whatsoever in theology. One can consider the infallibility of the Church as analogous with the inerrancy maintained by this position. This position holds that saving truth is communicated, or things useful for the sake of this truth. The Church is infallible in matters of faith and morals, and also in whatever is necessary to preserve these things. But it is not immediately clear how to determine whether something pertains to the truth of salvation, or whether something pertains to the truth of faith and morals. Now, in the case of the teaching of the Church, this determination is done by the Church itself. If the Church defines that something pertains to faith, then it does pertain to faith. But Scripture does not in general distinguish between things that pertain to the truth of salvation and other things that do not. Therefore the question of whether something pertains to the truth of salvation cannot be settled from Scripture, or by the science of exegesis, but this question is left to be resolved by the arbitrary judgement of the exegete. It follows from this that this position does not limit one to saying that there are certain kinds of false statements in Scripture. Whatever does not pertain to what one regards as the truth of salvation can be held to be a false statement, but useful in some way. Thus this position denies the authority of Scripture, in much the way that one would deny the authority of the Church if one said that its infallibility is limited to certain matters, these matters not being determined by the Church itself.

But if one accepts the infallibility of the Church, then it might seem that this problem can be resolved. One might say, for example, that if someone interprets Scripture in such a way that it contradicts the defined teaching of the Church, then we necessarily have a misinterpretation. But this does not follow. For God caused Scripture to be written in such a way that the truth of salvation would be communicated, but only so that it would be communicated in the way and manner, and at the time, that he wished. Thus something contrary to the doctrine of the Church could be found in Scripture, not because God wished to teach this as a truth, but because it was useful in order to lead men to something better. Thus the truth of salvation would not be directly stated, but something useful for that truth would be written. For example, one might hold that Qoheleth taught that man's soul is not immortal because it was useful that men should believe this for a certain time. For the same reason this position does not demand inerrancy even with respect to the doctrinal teaching of the New Testament. One might hold, for example, that the New Testament is mistaken concerning homosexuality or women's ordination. In addition, even if the infallibility of the Church is accepted as a limitation on false statements in Scripture, this would not suffice to make Scripture of *itself* an authority. If Scripture speaks of a theological matter that has not been

²¹¹ *Summa Theologiae* I, 103, 4, corp.

settled by the Church, one might say that a certain statement is false because it does not pertain to the truth of salvation. Thus this position must hold that Scripture considered in itself has no authority in theology, and serves no function other than a poetical or rhetorical one.

II. OBJECTIONS TO THE DOCTRINE

Next objections to the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture must be considered. There are two kinds of objections to the doctrine. First objections to the truth of the doctrine will be addressed, and then objections against the utility of the doctrine.

a. Objections to the truth of the doctrine

First the objection that Scripture contains particular examples of statements that are clearly false will be considered, and then objections against the answer to this objection. Then objections that do not depend on particular examples of apparently false statements will be answered.

Some object that Scripture contains particular examples of false statements, as was Cardinal König's opinion concerning history and Norbert Lohfink's concerning natural science and religion. A particular objection says that some particular fact or facts are contrary to some particular text or texts of Scripture. In order to answer the objection one must deny the reality or accuracy of what is claimed to be a fact, or show that a genuine fact is not truly contrary to the intention present in the text of Scripture. But it is impossible to answer every particular objection, because they are indefinite in number, and one might always come up with more objections.²¹² It is therefore necessary to give a general account that explains the existence of apparent false statements, and shows that their presence in Scripture is necessary. Once this has been done such objections have no force, unless someone brings forward an objection that has no possible answer, which has not been done.²¹³

When the problem of the manner of speech of the human authors of Scripture was discussed, it was said that the mode of speech follows the nature of the instrument, while the thought expressed by the speech is the divine thought. Now, the human instrument is a deficient instrument. "It should be said that in prophetic revelation the mind of the prophet is moved by the Holy Spirit as a deficient instrument with respect to a principal agent."²¹⁴ It therefore follows that the divine thought will be expressed in the manner proper to a deficient instrument. Consequently certain defects will be present in the written text of Scripture which follow the mode of the human author. When the author of Maccabees says of his writing, "if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do,"²¹⁵ he expresses this point. He does not say that God could not do better, but that he himself could not do better. His writing expresses the divine thought, but it does so in the manner proper to the human author. Thus certain defects are present in Scripture. If the human author is a bad grammarian, then the text of Scripture may be grammatically bad. If the human author is a bad rhetorician, then the text of Scripture may be rhetorically bad.

It might seem from what has been said above that if the human author of Scripture is ignorant and believes what is false, then it follows that the text of Scripture will express ignorance and error, and thus that Scripture will contain errors. But the reason that this does not follow is that Scripture contains the divine word, but expressed in the manner proper to the deficient instrument. From this it follows that if the human author is ignorant or in error, then the text of Scripture will express the divine word, but in the manner proper to one ignorant or in error. But because the divine word

²¹² In any case, to answer particular objections pertains to Scriptural exegesis rather than to the present work.

²¹³ As has been said, this is impossible because there are no such examples.

²¹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 173, 4, corp.

²¹⁵ 2 Maccabees 15:38.

contains no falsehood, the text of Scripture will express something true, but in a deficient manner. This deficient manner may well reveal the ignorance and error of the human writer, but these defects are not the substance of his writing, but the manner of his writing.

It follows from this that when the human author holds something false, he will not necessarily take care to write in such a way that he cannot be interpreted to assert his false view. Such care is proper to one who knows the truth, while the absence of such care is proper to one who is ignorant. This does not mean that in such a case something false is asserted in Scripture, but rather that something false might appear to be asserted in Scripture. The author does not assert his false view, but he does not take care that one will not take him to be asserting it.

Such instances will be multiplied to the extent that the human authors of Scripture are ignorant or in error. Now, if one accepts Grelot's distinction between what is principal and what is secondary in the text of Scripture, it can be shown that the human authors of Scripture will often be ignorant or hold erroneous opinions. St. Thomas makes a similar distinction.

Therefore it is to be said that the *per se* object of faith is that through which a man is made blessed, as was said above. But *per accidens* or secondarily all the things contained in Sacred Scripture divinely handed down have relation to the object of the virtue, as that Abraham had two sons, that David was the son of Jesse, and other things of this kind. With respect to the first things to be believed, therefore, which are the articles of faith, man is bound to believe explicitly, even as he is bound to have faith. But with respect to the other things to be believed, man is not bound to believe explicitly, but only implicitly or in the preparation of his soul, insofar as he is prepared to believe whatever is contained in divine Scripture. But then only is he bound to believe something of this kind when it is proven to him to be contained in the doctrine of the faith.²¹⁶

Man is not bound to *explicit* belief in everything contained in Scripture, but only in the principal doctrines of Scripture, through which a man becomes blessed. Now, all of Sacred Scripture is given to man that he might become blessed. It follows from this that the secondary teachings of Scripture are for the sake of the principal teachings.

In order for a man to be an author of Scripture, then, he must know the principal doctrines about which he is to write and the secondary teachings insofar as these are necessary for the principal teachings. It follows that he must receive instruction from God, whether through natural means or through supernatural revelation, concerning both the principal doctrines and the secondary things insofar as they are necessary for the sake of the principal doctrines. But because not every author of Scripture writes about every doctrine, and because the details concerning the secondary things may not be very important, not every author of Scripture needs to be perfectly instructed. For example, Qoheleth may not have been instructed concerning the immortality of the soul because it was not necessary to reveal this particular doctrine at this particular time. Similarly, the authors of Scripture in general may not have been well instructed in the details of science and history, because a detailed knowledge of science and history is usually not necessary for the sake of the principal doctrines. But it was said above that to the extent that the authors of Scripture are ignorant or hold erroneous opinions, the text of Scripture may reveal their ignorance or even seem to assert what is false. Since the authors of Scripture are often ignorant in matters of science and history, therefore, there are many apparent errors in Scripture.

Thus, the fact that there seem to be errors in Scripture is not an objection against the doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Rather, this truth follows necessarily from the doctrine of inspiration insofar as this doctrine is that what is contained in Scripture is the divine thought expressed in a human manner. But it also follows from this doctrine that no errors at all are actually asserted in Scripture. Thus apparent errors cannot be used as an objection against this doctrine.

²¹⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 2, 5, corp.

One might object to this answer in two ways. First, it could be said that this account is unreasonable because it is too improbable. Burtchaell holds this position:

Almost to a man, Catholic divines who have written to our theme have taken inerrancy for granted. Even more, they have dedicated themselves to it, bent their efforts to its needs, written as if its defense gave all meaning to their exertions. They have so written, not from conviction that the Bible is inerrant, but from faith that it must be so. Many monographs have provided compendious and detailed studies of scriptural passages with an eye to vindicating them of any charge of error. But this does not obscure the fact that their concern derives from ecclesiastical, not biblical premises. The texts are forced to serve as proofs of a doctrine they did not themselves engender.

Catholics have achieved noteworthy exegetical dexterity in their concern for inerrancy. They have developed strong sensitivities for hidden citations, literary forms, primitive non-literal expressions, non-assertive discourse, re-editing, and any other feature that will allow them to shrink down the total of biblical affirmations enough to accommodate the axiom, 'All that the sacred writer asserts, enunciates, suggests, must be held to be asserted, enunciated, suggested by the Holy Spirit.' Uncritical defense of inerrancy has at times involved disturbing disregard for the obvious facts. Divine faith admittedly carries the mind beyond the obvious, but I know of no requirement that it take the long way around.²¹⁷

Burtchaell objects that it is not on the basis of Scripture that men say that it is inerrant, but only because of faith in the teaching of the Church. In fact, he says, it is obvious from the text of Scripture itself that it contains errors. It is not likely that he wishes to deny the theoretical possibility of answers such as those given by the Catholics of "noteworthy exegetical dexterity." Rather, his position is that there is no reason to think that their answers are true, especially when they must be multiplied to fit case after case without number.

Burtchaell's claim is true in part. It is indeed from faith that one holds that Scripture is inerrant, and not from an examination of the text. This is necessary because of the necessity of apparent errors in Scripture. Because of this one cannot prove the inerrancy of Scripture from an examination of the text. If one took a work not inspired by God and claimed that it was inerrant, resolving possible objections by whatever means available, this would indeed be an unreasonable procedure. This is because one would make an indefinite number of improbable claims in order to defend the inerrancy of the work. But in Sacred Scripture the multiplication of unlikely resolutions to difficulties does not happen by chance, but this happens because of the power of the providence of God who willed to communicate his thought in a human manner. It is not necessarily the case that a particular resolution to a particular objection is true, but there is necessarily some true resolution. It is not less reasonable to believe this than it is to believe in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, which seems contrary to the senses. This is reasonable because the doctrine does not demand that things should appear to the senses in any other way, and similarly the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture does not require that there be no seeming errors in Scripture.

Second, one might object that the answer is unreasonable because it compromises the dignity of the letter of Scripture to such a degree that one might as well admit the existence of errors. This objection can take several forms. First, someone might say that the difference between an explanation allowing that the author believed something false, but did not assert it, and an explanation in which he does assert it, is only a difference of degree. In either case the author believed something false and manifested his false belief.

²¹⁷ Burtchaell, 288-289. For many examples of techniques developed by exegetes to defend inerrancy, see Fr. William Most's book, *Free From all Error*. Not all such techniques can be endorsed without qualification, but an examination of these techniques and the determination of their application to various kinds of apparent errors are outside the scope of this work.

But even if in some sense with respect to the human author there is only a difference in degree, from God's point of view there is a substantial difference. It is one thing to say something true through a deficient instrument and thus in a deficient manner. It is quite the opposite to say something false.

Second, one might insist that if in a purely human writing someone manifested a false belief, then one would say that this was an error. Raymond Brown appears to hold this position, and thus he concludes that Scripture contains historical errors:

Despite the respect that bound Catholic scholars to papal statements, this effort [of Pope Benedict XV by means of *Spiritus Paraclitus*] to save historical inerrancy failed, for the twentieth century produced indisputable evidence of historical inaccuracies in the Bible.

[A footnote to the preceding] For instance, the discovery of the Neo-Babylonian chronicles made it lucidly clear that the dates assigned to various Babylonian interventions in Daniel were wrong; no longer could exegetes say that those dates might be true because of our ignorance of Babylonian chronology. One may very well answer that the author of Daniel was not writing history, but surely he used those dates because he thought they were correct.²¹⁸

Brown's opinion is that the author of Daniel erred because "he used those dates because he thought they were correct." Since Brown says that the author may not have been writing history, and since it follows that he may not have asserted the truth of the dates, Brown can only be saying that the manifestation of an erroneous opinion is itself an error.

In regard to merely human writings, there would be some reason for this position. This is accounted for by what was said above. Merely human writing must be measured from the point of view of man. In such writing the author would have asserted his false position if questioned about it, and thus it does not make much difference whether he only manifests his false opinion or states his opinion. But God would not say what is false in any case whatsoever. Thus in judging Scripture such things are not to be called errors simply, although one might say that they are errors in a certain respect. Scripture does not contain errors properly speaking, but certain errors are expressed in the manner of the writing.²¹⁹

Third, one might say that if God were to say such things in such a deficient manner from his own self, this would be blameworthy. Spinoza gives this objection.

If anyone thinks that I am speaking too generally, and without sufficient warrant, I would ask him to set himself to showing some fixed plan in these histories [contained in Scripture] which might be followed without blame by other writers of chronicles, and in his efforts at harmonizing and interpretation, so strictly to observe and explain the phrases and expressions, the order and the connections, that we may be able to imitate these also in our writings.²²⁰

Spinoza's point is that if a writer were deliberately to set out to write an inerrant history such as is contained in Sacred Scripture, he would be blameworthy because he would mislead people. Because Scripture is written in a manner proper to men who are often ignorant or in error, if someone deliberately wrote in such a manner others would necessarily be deceived either about the

²¹⁸ *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 15-16. One might be surprised by the assumption that if Daniel appears to differ from the Neo-Babylonian chronicles, it should immediately be concluded that the book of Daniel is in error, while the secular chronicles are assumed to be accurate.

²¹⁹ Thus in this sense Newman was right to say that *obiter dicta* can be found in the Bible.

²²⁰ *A Theological-Political Treatise*, tr. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), 139.

writer or about the things of which the writer spoke. Similarly it seems that God would be blameworthy for writing in this manner. If he is not, then it seems that he is not responsible even if the human author asserts what is false.

The answer to Spinoza's argument about the human author is that Scripture was not written by omniscient men, but by men guided by the providence of God. Thus it is true that there is no procedure for writing history that can be followed precisely in order to compose history similar to that in Sacred Scripture. If someone knowing the truth writes as if ignorant of the truth, he may be blameworthy, and this is why one cannot deliberately imitate the Scripture without blame. But if someone ignorant of some truth does not express knowledge of that truth, this is not blameworthy, and this is why the authors of Scripture are without blame if they do not "know how to state a fact."²²¹ They may not have known the facts and thus could not be expected to know how to state them.

Nor is God blameworthy, precisely because he speaks in the manner proper to his instrument. God perhaps would be deceptive if he spoke in such a manner from his own self, but he does not do this. But on the other hand he would be deceptive if he said what is false through any instrument whatever.

Fourth, someone might object that God gave Scripture so that men could understand something. It might seem more likely that he would allow something false to be written than that he would cause something true to be written which is almost certain to be misunderstood. But the answer to this is that he did not give Scripture in order to let men know all things about all things, and so if some things are present in an obscure manner in Scripture, this is no objection. In addition, because God "has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts,"²²² it is not surprising that the assumption that one can immediately understand everything in Scripture can easily lead one into error.

Now that particular objections have been considered in a general manner, and objections to this general response, it is necessary to consider other general objections. Most can be resolved without great difficulty by means of what has been said. First, someone might say that if the human author does not know everything concerning science and history, then God must reveal such things to him or he *must* fall into error. This seems to be Burtchaell's position.

To sum up: in early days men naturally assumed that if a statement or a document were God's work, then it must enjoy his absolute authority; and if it were so authoritative, then it must have become so by miraculous production. It was as if the Bible needed wondrous origins comparable to Jesus' virgin birth. We have, of course, abandoned much of this myth of miraculous biblical origins, but the residual belief, that the Bible could not be God's word were it not inerrant, has led theologians around in circles these many years.²²³

Burtchaell says that it was assumed that Scripture is inerrant because it is the word of God, and that this happened miraculously. But because it is now known that this did not happen miraculously, it should be concluded that Scripture is not inerrant. For example, someone might say that either the author of Genesis asserts that there is a dome in the sky or God instructs him so that he says this in a metaphorical sense. But the second does not seem very reasonable, since it is not necessary for men to know about the structure of the heavens. Therefore the human author must assert what is false in this case. The answer to this objection is evident from what has been said. In this particular example it is not unreasonable to suppose that the human author knows that there is not a dome, but

²²¹ Spinoza, 139.

²²² Luke 1:51.

²²³ Burtchaell, 294-295.

speaks in the customary manner.²²⁴ But even if it is supposed that he believes in the existence of such a dome and is not instructed by God, it does not follow that he makes such an assertion. Rather divine providence causes him to assert only what God wishes to assert, perhaps in such a way that the human author does not take care that his expression cannot be taken to assert the existence of such a dome. The essential mistake in this objection is that it does not take into account the power of divine providence. Burtchaell makes this mistake in the text quoted. He criticizes the early assumptions, but nonetheless he accepts the assumption that if Scripture is inerrant, it must have become so through miraculous means. But in truth this happened through God's providence, which can use whatever means it pleases.

Grillmeier's objection that the inerrancy of Scripture is Scriptural monophysitism has also been answered implicitly in the general solution to difficulties. All aspects of the human author's personality, writing style, and even mistaken personal beliefs can become manifest in the written text of Scripture. Nonetheless he asserts nothing false in his text, on account of the divine authorship. Thus the text of Scripture takes on all human properties except those contrary to the dignity of the word of God. Not only is it not Scriptural monophysitism to hold the doctrine of inerrancy, but Grillmeier's own position was shown above to be a kind of Scriptural Nestorianism. Grillmeier holds that there are false statements in Scripture, statements that must be attributed to the human author alone. Thus these words are merely human words, rather than the words of God.

Third, someone might say that the doctrine of inerrancy cannot be true because it forces one to twist the obvious meaning of the text, which ought to be judged on internal criteria. Spinoza suggests this objection.

The commentators make many other assertions of this kind [twisting the sense of a passage], which if true, would prove that the ancient Hebrews were ignorant both of their own language, and of the way to relate a plain narrative. I should in such a case recognize no rule or reason in interpreting Scripture, but it would be permissible to hypothesize to one's heart's content.²²⁵

Spinoza's claim is that one can only hold that Scripture is inerrant if one twists the obvious sense of the text, which ought not to be done. But if one takes this objection to mean that the meaning of Scripture should be judged on internal criteria alone, without regard for the principle that Scripture is inerrant, then the objection is not true even as applied to merely human writings. For example, if one knows for certain that an author holds a definite view, and then one comes upon something in his writing which seems contrary to his view, one then attempts to interpret it in such a way that it fits with his general position. Only if there is no reasonable way to do this will one conclude that

²²⁴ Because Leo XIII said that the sacred authors wrote according to custom, some say that the Pope implicitly admitted the existence of errors in Scripture. "Already in 1893 Pope Leo XIII in *Providentissimus Deus* (DBS 3288) excluded natural or scientific matters from biblical inerrancy, even if he did this through the expedient of insisting that statements made about nature according to ordinary appearances were not errors. (An example might involve the sun going around the earth.) While this understanding of error echoes an ancient equation of inerrancy with freedom from deception, it sounds strange to modern ears, for inculpable mistakes cease to be errors. In any case, Pope Leo's approach undermined the very purpose for which most people want to stress inerrancy, namely, so that they can give unlimited confidence to biblical statements. The theory that these statements were made according to surface appearances and so are not necessarily correct from a scientific viewpoint is a backdoor way of admitting human conditioning on the part of the biblical authors" (Raymond Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 15). Brown's position is that one who speaks according to the appearances speaks falsely when the appearances do not correspond with the things, at least when he speaks without knowledge of the things. Thus, according to Brown, if someone does not know that the earth revolves, and he says that the sun rises, he makes a false statement. From this it follows that if such a man were to say that the sun does not rise, he would speak truly. This seems a very odd claim, to say the least. Nor does Pope Leo XIII undermine the purpose of the doctrine of inerrancy, since the primary purpose of holding the doctrine is in order to recognize the true nature of Scripture as written by men inspired by God.

²²⁵ Spinoza, 139.

the author is contradicting his own opinion. Similarly, because God is truth itself, and God is the author of Scripture, it is reasonable to interpret what he says to be in accord with the truth.

On the other hand, there is a difference between the two cases. In the case of a human author, one can sometimes conclude that he contradicts his own opinion because there is no other possible interpretation of the text. In the case of Scripture, however, it might sometimes be necessary to suspend judgement concerning the meaning of a certain text. If one does not see any reasonable interpretation in accord with truth, then one must suspend judgement. It is not necessary either to admit the existence of error in Scripture or to assert that the meaning of the text is something unreasonable. If one jumps to such a conclusion, this is due to intellectual curiosity, not to the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture.²²⁶ “There are some things in them hard to understand.”²²⁷ It is necessary to be patient if one wishes to avoid unreasonable conclusions, and this is particularly true in the study of theology because of its difficulty.

Fourth, someone might object that the doctrine of Scripture’s inerrancy is itself contrary to Scripture. In some cases it might seem to be denied that Scripture expresses God’s word. “To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.”²²⁸ This appears to suggest that this particular text of Scripture is not from God. But the context shows that St. Paul means to say that this is not a command from God, not that the text itself is not from God. Either God gives this as advice, or he asserts that this is St. Paul’s advice. Other similar cases can be treated in a similar manner. In no place does Scripture say that Scripture is not the word of God or that it contains false statements.

Fifth, one might object, as was pointed out earlier, that the Church might have received an erroneous doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture from the Jews and only slowly purified it. In part this is answered by seeing that the teaching of the inerrancy of Scripture is an unchangeable doctrine of the Church, and so it is a true doctrine regardless of what one posits as the original reasons for the doctrine. In addition, the Church’s tradition distinguishes between man and God as authors of Scripture and posits different things pertaining to them, as was pointed out in regard to Lohfink’s claim that the Church did not carefully consider the subject of inerrancy. The Church has never posited an absolute perfection in the human authors of Scripture, but it has held with the certainty of faith that none of them ever said what is false in the text of Scripture. Insofar as this care in distinguishing the human and divine authors of Scripture is not so present in the tradition of the Jews, one cannot say that the Church’s position derives from any extreme position held by the Jews.

But if one insists that the Church’s tradition does seem to emphasize too strongly the perfection of Scripture, in a way that seems inconsistent with the human deficiencies asserted by this work to be necessarily present in Scripture, then it is necessary to distinguish between essential and accidental elements in the Church’s tradition. For example, St. Augustine raises the question of the eloquence of Scripture:

Here, perhaps, some one inquires whether the authors whose divinely-inspired writings constitute the canon, which carries with it a most wholesome authority, are to be considered wise only, or eloquent as well. A question which to me, and to those who think with me, is very easily settled. For where I understand these writers, it seems to me not only that nothing can be wiser, but also that nothing can be more eloquent. And I venture to affirm that all who truly understand what these writers say, perceive at the

²²⁶ Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 167, 1, corp. The claim that the high priest under which David entered the temple and ate the loaves had two names might be an example of such a rash assertion, although it is not impossible. Perhaps it is more likely that the text of the Gospel only asserts the words of Christ with regard to their substance, as seems to be generally the case with the discourses of Christ in the Gospels. If this is the case, then the name of the priest is added for distinctness, but it might not be asserted that Christ actually gave the name.

²²⁷ 2 Peter 3:16.

²²⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:12.

same time that it could not have been properly said in any other way. For as there is a kind of eloquence that is more becoming in youth, and a kind that is more becoming in old age, and nothing can be called eloquence if it be not suitable to the person of the speaker, so there is a kind of eloquence that is becoming in men who justly claim the highest authority, and who are evidently inspired of God.²²⁹

St. Augustine clearly distinguishes between the truth of Scripture and its eloquence. No one can question the truth of Scripture, but with respect to the eloquence of Scripture, a question can be raised, even if it is easily settled. Thus it is clear that St. Augustine believes the truth of Scripture to pertain to the faith, while the eloquence of Scripture does not, and hence disagreement is allowed as regards the latter, but not as regards the former. But it is not necessary to disagree with St. Augustine if one rightly understands his claim, because he does not claim that the authors always speak with human eloquence. This is clear from St. Augustine's position that the authors of Scripture should not be imitated in style or manner.

The expositors of these writers [of Scripture], then, ought not to express themselves in the same way, as if putting forward their expositions as of the same authority; but they ought in all their deliverances to make it their first and chief aim to be understood, using as far as possible such clearness of speech that either he will be very dull who does not understand them, or that if what they say should not be very easily or quickly understood, the reason will lie not in the manner of expression, but in the difficulty and subtlety of the matter they are trying to explain.²³⁰

St. Augustine thus holds that the authors of Scripture do not always speak with human eloquence, since it does not ordinarily pertain to human eloquence to speak in a manner difficult to understand. Now, it may be that St. Augustine wrongly holds that the writers of Scripture always know the reason for the obscurity of their writings, but one can grant his point about the eloquence of Scripture insofar as the obscurity of Scripture has its reasons in divine providence. In any case, it is clear that the distinction between the truth of Scripture and the eloquence of Scripture is a distinction between what is primary and what is secondary, what is essential and what is accidental.

Finally, even if some have in the past overemphasized the perfection of Scripture, nothing can be gained by overemphasizing its imperfection. If the inerrancy of Scripture is denied, it is difficult to distinguish Scripture from any other human writing. Burtchaell claims, "It is not the writing process of the Bible that differs from that of other books; it is the Bible that is different."²³¹ But then he goes on to make it indistinguishable from all other writings, as can be seen from the following passages.

But the Christian conscience has customarily treated this particular collection [Scripture] as something special. What is peculiar about it? For one thing, it is drawn only from a certain, limited era. It represents the vicissitudes of belief, in one way or another, from the time it all began within Abraham until the impact left by Jesus Christ had sunk into the community he left behind. The Bible is the chief record of the faith's gestation, of those long years when Christianity was carried in the womb of Israel. It documents that time—never to be repeated—when God's revelation was slowly and painfully trying to assert itself amid the night of human disinterest. This period, however, has left other documents, other records. Some of these have brought suit to be admitted into this collection, yet a determined policy of selectivity has culled out all but the few we call Scripture. It is not unfair to say that some of our canonical books

²²⁹ *On Christian Doctrine*, IV, 6, in NPNF, 1st series, 2:577.

²³⁰ *On Christian Doctrine*, IV, 6, in NPNF, 1st series, 2:581.

²³¹ Burtchaell, 294.

might have been omitted, or some of the apocrypha included, without altering the character of the collection noticeably. In this respect canonicity does have something arbitrary about it.²³²

As this use [discerning heresy from orthodoxy] and veneration of the sacred books became ever more reflective, one constant purpose and trend emerged: to select those past writings which represent the mainstream of development from Abraham to Christ, and through Christ to wherever a particular Church stood. A canon was a loyalty device precisely because faith, as it developed, could point off in any number of directions, and the canon purposely included those documents that—apart from others—best pointed to where the Spirit had led the Church.

What does the Church find in her Scriptures? As in other literature of her past, she finds what former believers had to say about God and their life in his sight. And as in that other literature, she does not expect to find a statement for the present, a perfect expression of the mind of God. Accordingly as it is a faithful reproduction of past belief, the Bible will display the imperfections, confusions, shortsightedness, inconsistency, and errors that beset believers of that era, as they are always going to afflict the faith of feeble men.²³³

Here Burtchaell claims to speak of Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit. But one might suspect that he speaks rather of writings inspired by the human spirit.

b. Objections to the utility of the doctrine

Next it is necessary to consider objections to the utility of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. First, it might seem that the doctrine of inerrancy is not useful for an understanding of Scripture. It would not be useful for understanding Scripture if by it one is led to interpretations of the text more distant from the true meaning than if one held that there are errors in Scripture. But this might seem to be the case, especially in light of the account given of seeming errors in the first part of the objections. If one comes upon a statement that seems to be false and interprets it to say something true, one might come up with a highly improbable reading, and it might be nearer to the truth simply to say that it is a false statement.

In part this can be answered by what was said above concerning intellectual curiosity. If one accepts the inerrancy of Scripture it is not necessary to jump to the conclusion that a text appearing erroneous has some wildly implausible meaning. It is enough to say that one does not understand it. But even if one does make such a jump, it is not true that one will be more distant from the truth than if one says that it is a false statement. For example, if someone does not know the nature of a disputed question, he may begin to read the *Summa Theologiae* and see that it appears that St. Thomas contradicts himself, since he says in an objection that God does not exist, while he says in the body that God does exist.²³⁴ In such a case the most appropriate thing to do would be for him to suspend his judgement until he understood the nature of a disputed question. But if he does make a judgement, he can do this in two ways. Either he may say that St. Thomas contradicts himself and says both that God does and does not exist, or he may interpret the texts so that they are consistent. For example, he might say that in the objection St. Thomas understands ‘God’ as a vague cloud of infinite goodness of such a nature that all evil is excluded, and in the response as a certain infinite good of a different nature. He says the first kind of God does not exist and the second kind does

²³² Burtchaell, 301.

²³³ Burtchaell, 303.

²³⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, I, 2, 3. Such problems are often actually raised by students new to St. Thomas and to the scholastic method.

exist. Now if one considers which of these readings is closer to the intention of St. Thomas, then one can see that the position that St. Thomas contradicts himself may be nearer to the surface appearance of the texts, but the reading of the texts as consistent is nearer to St. Thomas' intention regarding the article as a whole. If one says that St. Thomas contradicts himself, one misses the whole point of the article, which is simply to argue that God exists. Thus the reading that interprets the texts so that they are consistent is better than the reading saying that the texts contradict one another. Similarly, if Scripture is inerrant, it is better and closer to God's intention if one interprets it to say what is true, even if one twists the meaning of the text, than it is to say that the text says what is false. But in any case such intellectual curiosity is to be avoided and corrected. St. Augustine discusses the danger of this kind of error:

Whoever takes another meaning out of Scripture than the writer intended, goes astray, but not through any falsehood in Scripture. Nevertheless, as I was going to say, if his mistaken interpretation tends to build up love, which is the end of the commandment, he goes astray in much the same way as a man who by mistake quits the high road, but yet reaches through the fields the same place to which the road leads. He is to be corrected, however, and to be shown how much better it is not to quit the straight road, lest, if he get into the habit of going astray, he may sometimes take cross roads, or even go in the wrong direction altogether.²³⁵

Second, it might seem that the doctrine of Scripture's inerrancy derogates from the care necessary for understanding Scripture, especially in light of the account given of seeming errors in the first part of the objections. If seeming errors are present simply because of the limitations of the human author, then one might conclude that the details of the text are unimportant. But this conclusion does not follow. The reason for this is that God is responsible not only for the *meaning* of the text, but also for the *mode* in which it expresses something. If the text expresses something in a limited, human manner, this is only because God wished to express something in this manner. Thus there will necessarily be reasons in God's providence for what pertains to the mode of expression, and for all seeming defects in the text. St. Thomas offers an example of such a reason for a human defect while discussing the problem of a prophecy of Jeremiah cited by Matthew.

But there is a question, why does he [Matthew] say: *Saying through Jeremiah the prophet*, since the words as they lie there [Matthew 27:9], are not found in the whole of Sacred Scripture. Nevertheless something similar is found in Zachariah 11:12, *They paid my price, thirty pieces of silver*. There is therefore the question, why is this set down as said by Jeremiah, since it was said by Zachariah.... Augustine solves this: Sometimes it happens that as one wishes to express the name of one author, the name of another occurs to one; therefore it might be that when he [Matthew] wished to write Zachariah, he wrote Jeremiah. But there were then many Jews who knew the law; why did they not correct this? Because they thought that this was divinely spoken, because all prophets spoke from the Holy Spirit, and the words of the prophet do not have efficacy except from the Holy Spirit; therefore in order that they might suggest this mystery, they did not correct it.²³⁶

St. Thomas suggests that Matthew made a mistake, not in the sense that he made a false statement, but in the sense that he wrote something other than what he intended to write, and that this happened in order to show that God is the author of *all* prophecy. Thus it does not matter whether

²³⁵ *On Christian Doctrine*, I, 36, in NPNF, 1st series, 2:533.

²³⁶ *In Evangelium S. Matthaei Commentaria*, Ch. 27 (Rome: Marietti, 1919), p. 381. Here we have yet another example of an objection raised at the time of Second Vatican Council, supposedly as a result of modern science and research, but which was addressed centuries ago.

Jeremiah or Zachariah made this prophecy, and God indicated this by allowing Matthew to write the wrong name.

Third, someone might object that the doctrine of inerrancy is not useful for the knowledge of theology. Theology does not depend on history and natural science, and therefore it does not benefit theology to know that Scripture does not err in these matters. For example, as Newman pointed out, it does not seem important to know whether or not Paul actually left his cloak at Troas with Carpus. It does not seem that one derives theological conclusions from this fact.

In the first place, even if there were no such benefit to theology in the doctrine of inerrancy, the doctrine would benefit theology precisely in the sense that the doctrine is part of theology, and therefore is ordered to the whole science. Similarly one might say that the teaching that Christ never sinned does not “benefit” theology. But just as if Christ had committed a sin, it would follow that God was a sinner, so also if there were a false statement in Scripture, it would follow that God was a liar.

But it is not true that there are no other benefits that result from the doctrine. The doctrine forces one to take care in explaining the nature of the texts of Scripture, and therefore one will take care in finding the theological meaning of Scripture. In addition, historical and natural truths are contained in Scripture for the sake of the principal truths revealed, and therefore to know these truths is useful to some degree. For example, if one denies the historical fact that Christ chose only men as apostles, one will assert that women should be ordained to the priesthood, a theological error. It is true that the knowledge of historical facts contained only obscurely in Scripture cannot be very necessary for the principal doctrines. But one who maintains that obscure statements in Scripture can be false must also maintain that clear statements in Scripture can be false.

Fourth, one might object that the doctrine of inerrancy is not useful for theology because it subjects theology to natural reason. Spinoza raises this objection.

Such are the words of Maimonides [to the effect that Scripture is to be interpreted in accord with what is known to be true by reason], and they are evidently sufficient to establish our point: for if he had been convinced by reason that the world is eternal, he would not have hesitated to twist and explain away the words of Scripture till he made them appear to teach this doctrine. He would have felt quite sure that Scripture, though everywhere plainly denying the eternity of the world, really intends to teach it. So that, however clear the meaning of Scripture may be, he would not feel certain of having grasped it, so long as he remained doubtful of the truth of what was written. For we are in doubt whether a thing is in conformity with reason, or contrary thereto, so long as we are uncertain of its truth, and, consequently, we cannot be sure whether the literal meaning of a passage be true or false....

Further, the truth of this theory would involve that the masses, having generally no comprehension of, nor leisure for, detailed proofs, would be reduced to receiving all their knowledge of Scripture on the authority and testimony of philosophers, and, consequently, would be compelled to suppose that the interpretations given by philosophers were infallible.

Truly this would be a new form of ecclesiastical authority, and a new sort of priests or pontiffs, more likely to excite men's ridicule than their veneration.²³⁷

Spinoza says that if one must interpret Scripture to be in accord with reason, then one cannot know the meaning of Scripture until one knows the nature of things. But this objection is based on the implicit denial that Scripture is in fact in accord with reason and inerrant. If Scripture is entirely true, then one can take any reality and judge that Scripture cannot be contrary to that reality. But one can also take the clear sense of Scripture and judge that reality cannot be contrary to Scripture.

²³⁷ Spinoza, 115-116.

Thus philosophy has no more authority over exegesis than exegesis has over philosophy. The reason for the objection is the assumption that the clear sense of Scripture is contrary to reality, so that one can conclude in only one direction, from things to the sense of Scripture. But to say that the clear sense of Scripture is contrary to reality is simply to say that Scripture is false, which is not the case. Thus if Scripture does in fact “everywhere plainly” deny the eternity of the world, then the world is not eternal according to the nature of things, and any opposing arguments can be answered.²³⁸

Fifth, one might object that inerrancy is not useful because it is harmful in other ways. First, it might seem that it can be harmful with respect to the intellectual life. Belief in inerrancy is often connected with fundamentalism, and it is claimed that fundamentalism and belief in inerrancy destroy the intellect.

The stubborn defense on the part of many of its [fundamentalism’s] followers of a theory of verbal inerrancy inevitably leads to a sacrifice of the intellect. The theory itself is largely the product of seventeenth-century Protestant scholasticism and lacks deeper roots in the Christian tradition.²³⁹

The meaning of ‘verbal inerrancy’ in this comment is not clear. If this includes the doctrine defended by this work, then the doctrine certainly has far deeper roots in the Christian tradition, as was shown in the first half of the work. To say that this doctrine leads to a sacrifice of the intellect means that it leads one to hold unreasonable beliefs. But this is not necessary, as was said above, since unreasonable beliefs are the consequence of intellectual curiosity. In the particular case of Protestant fundamentalism, this usually takes the form of believing that the inerrancy of Scripture requires that everything be taken according to the first sense of the words. For example, according to this method one concludes from Genesis 1 that the world was made in six twenty-four hour days, some of which existed before the sun, in terms of which a day is defined. To jump from the truth of Scripture to conclusions of this kind is curiosity, and such conclusions do not follow from the doctrine of inerrancy. Thus a sacrifice of the intellect is not necessary, but patience and faith in divine revelation are necessary if one is to hold the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. In fact, far from sacrificing itself, the intellect is perfected by submitting itself to divine revelation.

Again, one might object that the doctrine of inerrancy is psychologically harmful. Grillmeier seems to suggest that this is the case in a text quoted previously.

But there are also parts of Scripture which have only an auxiliary function in relation to these direct truths of salvation. Here, from the point of view of the secular sciences, somewhat less than the truth can be expressed. Here we must accept facts without prejudice and without anxiety. The question of inerrancy is not to become a matter of a bad conscience or false attitudes but should open one’s eyes to the full nature of Scripture.²⁴⁰

Similarly, he states in his conclusion, “The age of anxiety in relation to Scripture is to be regarded as over—a new life with it is to start.”²⁴¹ The position is that the doctrine of inerrancy leads to bad conscience, false attitudes, and anxiety. But this objection amounts to nothing unless the doctrine is false or doubtful. One who accepts inerrancy certainly has a false attitude if the doctrine is false. But if the doctrine is true, then his attitude is not false. If someone is in constant anxiety over the inerrancy of Scripture, this is not because of the doctrine, but because he doubts the doctrine.

²³⁸ Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 8, corp.

²³⁹ R. Harrisville and W. Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 199.

²⁴⁰ Grillmeier, 236.

²⁴¹ Grillmeier, 246.

Someone who believes the doctrine does not worry about the possibility that he might find an error in Scripture, because he believes that this is impossible. Similarly, the doctrine would only lead to a bad conscience if someone claimed to believe the doctrine while in his heart doubting or denying it. If someone believes the doctrine because it is contained within divine revelation, and nothing causes him to doubt the doctrine, he does not have a bad conscience, since it is reasonable to accept divine revelation. This objection can only arise from someone who thinks that he sees errors in Scripture, and believes that everyone else must see the errors as well. From this he concludes that those who claim the inerrancy of Scripture must be lying or at least must be afraid that such ‘errors’ will turn out to be truly errors. But this is not the case. Those who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture do not find errors in Scripture, nor do they fear that apparent errors will turn out to be truly errors.

Finally, someone might claim that the doctrine of inerrancy as understood by this work is not a useful doctrine because it says nothing about the *text* of Scripture. If all apparent errors can be explained away in one way or another, then one can defend the inerrancy of any writing one wishes, and Scripture does not really turn out to be different from any other writing. It is necessary to say two things in answer to this. First, even if it were true that one could defend the inerrancy of any writing by the means proposed, it would not follow that the doctrine is useless. The reason is that in one case such a defense would be true, namely in the case of Scripture, and false in the case of other writings. Thus Scripture would in reality be different from other writings, but similar in appearance. Second, it is not true that any sort of seeming error can be explained away. If an author holds a position constantly, presents his view in many places, and argues it in many ways, then no one can claim that he does not assert this position, and if this position is false, then no one can legitimately say that he does not err. But if an author says something only once, it is true that this could be explained away. A simple way to do this would be to say that the author accidentally left out a word, and so his thought was badly expressed. Thus the doctrine of inerrancy does demand that Scripture *not* have certain kinds of seeming errors, namely, those that are certainly errors, or those that are in fact errors, while it allows Scripture to have other kinds of seeming errors.²⁴²

Along the same lines, someone might insist that the doctrine says nothing about the text of Scripture because the doctrine concerns the original manuscripts alone, and these are not in our possession. Raymond Collins holds this position:

Enlightened fundamentalists, however, are not impervious to the discrepancies in biblical mss. or in parallel narratives of the OT and the Gospels as detected by historical criticism. In a seminal article (“Inspiration,” *Presbyterian Review* 2 [1881] 225-60) A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield formulated three criteria that must be met before something can be considered an error such as to destroy the inerrancy-inspiration of the Scriptures. The error must (1) occur in the “original autograph” of the biblical text; (2) involve the true meaning and intention of the text, “definitely and certainly ascertained”; and (3) render that true meaning “directly and necessarily inconsistent” with some “certainly known” fact of history or science. But these criteria

²⁴² Because this answer to the objection maintains that the text of Scripture differs from other texts not only in reality, but also in appearance, it suggests the possibility of arguing for the inerrancy of Scripture on the basis of the general characteristics of the text. Thus some have argued that critical study of the text of Scripture actually verifies the doctrine of inerrancy: “If the New Testament, claiming full inspiration, did exhibit such internal characteristics as should set aside this claim, it would not be a trustworthy guide to salvation. But on the contrary, since all the efforts of the enemies of Christianity—eager to discover error by which they might convict the precious word of life of falsehood—have proved utterly vain, the Scriptures stand before us authenticated as from God. They are, then, just what they profess to be; and criticism only secures to them the more firmly the position they claim” (Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 441). Now one might use such an argument as probable, but one cannot really prove the doctrine in this way, because even a text containing errors would not necessarily contain errors that are provably such. Pope Pius XII also referred to this form of argument when he spoke of “proving” Scripture to be free of error.

deprive biblical inerrancy of rational verification, for (1) pertains to a text that is no longer extant.²⁴³

It is necessary to say that Hodge and Warfield are right in holding that inerrancy can only be wholly maintained in regard to the original texts of Scripture, because copyists and translators are evidently able to make mistakes in their copies and translations. Thus it follows, according to Collins, that the doctrine is useless, since it only concerns texts which are not in our possession. The answer to this is evident from what has been said above regarding isolated mistakes and mistakes which are asserted many times and in many ways. Because it must be admitted that the Church possesses the substance of Scripture,²⁴⁴ Scripture as possessed by the Church will be entirely free of the latter kind of error, while it will be capable of having the former kind of error. Nor is the doctrine useless even with regard to such isolated mistakes, because even in these cases the doctrine does in fact make some demand on the text. It demands precisely that such a mistake should not be an accurate translation or copy of the original text, and this is something subject in a general way to “rational verification,” even if not in every single case.

B. Inerrancy considered in relation to theology as a whole

Finally the relation between the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture and the rest of theology must be considered. When the tradition of the Jews was considered, it was stated that this doctrine is a doctrine most fundamental to the faith, as something common to both Jews and Christians. The reason for this is that the doctrine is very closely linked to the origin of all doctrine.

The God of all Providence, who in the adorable designs of His love at first elevated the human race to the participation of the divine nature, and afterwards delivered it from universal guilt and ruin, restoring it to its primitive dignity, has, in consequence, bestowed upon man a splendid gift and safeguard—making known to him, by supernatural means, the hidden mysteries of His divinity, His wisdom and His mercy.... This supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal Church, is contained both in unwritten traditions and written books, which are, therefore, called sacred and canonical because, “being written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they have God for their author, and as such have been delivered to the Church.”²⁴⁵

Leo XIII thus suggests that the belief in God’s authorship, and therefore the belief in the inerrancy of Scripture, are closely linked to the belief in divine revelation. This revelation was given by the providence of God for the sake of man’s supernatural end.

But it is necessary that the end be foreknown to men, who ought to order their intentions and actions to the end. Whence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain things which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ “Inspiration,” 52, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1031.

²⁴⁴ This is required by the definition of the Council of Trent, “If anyone, however, should not accept the said books [the canon as defined by Trent] as sacred and canonical, entire with all their parts, as they were wont to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate edition... let him be anathema” (Session IV, in Denz. 784). This definition cannot be taken to mean that the Vulgate is inspired in every verse and every word, but it does imply that the books of the Vulgate contain the substance of Scripture, since otherwise they would not be “sacred and canonical.”

²⁴⁵ Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, 3.

²⁴⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 1, corp.

St. Thomas thus says that the purpose of revelation is that man should know the end and the way to the end. The end is God. “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”²⁴⁷ The way to the end is to receive life from God through Christ. “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.”²⁴⁸ It follows that faith in God and in his providence is most necessary to man. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”²⁴⁹ In the second place faith in Christ is necessary. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life.”²⁵⁰

First the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture will be considered in relation to the existence of God and his providence, the ultimate end and the source of the attainment of the end. Then it will be considered in relation to Christ, who is the way to the end. Last it will be considered in relation to the existence of the revelation by which this end and the way to this end are made known to man. With respect to the first, it is immediately evident that one who denies the existence of God or his providence must deny the inerrancy of Scripture. God through his providence caused Scripture to be without error, and one who does not believe in the cause has no reason to believe in the effect. On the other hand, the connection between denying the inerrancy of Scripture and denying the existence or providence of God is not a necessary one. One might consistently hold that God exists and rules the world by his providence, and still assert that God has not caused Scripture to be without error.

But although the link between these denials is not a necessary one, they can often be found together. The reason for this is that the fundamental reason for denying the inerrancy of Scripture is either the denial of the existence of God or the denial of his providence. It has been shown above that Scripture’s inerrancy cannot be disproved by examples of errors, and that it is an effect of the excellence of divine providence. One who denies inerrancy thus must derogate from divine providence. But since the doctrine cannot be disproved from Scripture itself or from the Church’s tradition, the fundamental reason for this derogation can only be the implicit denial of providence itself, which is itself implicitly based upon the denial of God’s existence.²⁵¹ The opinion of the Modernists is an example of the denial of inerrancy resting on the denial of the existence of God, as was pointed out in the case of Loisy. Burtchaell’s position seems to be based implicitly on the denial of God’s providence. Burtchaell himself, however, supposes that his position is based upon a more perfect understanding of providence.

On a more refined view, God does not split responsibility with man, for he is a transcendent cause. He moves his creatures without himself moving. He does not need to intervene, for the distance between him and ourselves is not one that is bridged in this way. Whether we speak of the most ordinary human event or of the economy of the incarnation, it is the same: God is cause of human activity without himself reaching in to take control from us. Whether Peter catches fish or converts men, his acts are totally human and totally his. We are accustomed to see Christ as more intensely responsible for the latter type of fishing, and are tempted to imagine some rearrangement of procedure within Peter’s heart of hearts. But more correctly we should see that in both cases Christ is in equal and total control. There is a difference, not of procedure, but of finality, order, purpose, plan. When we predicate a human act of God, there need be nothing peculiar—discernible or not—in the dynamics of that

²⁴⁷ John 17:3.

²⁴⁸ John 17:1-2.

²⁴⁹ Hebrews 11:6.

²⁵⁰ John 3:16.

²⁵¹ Since God is not only provident, but is providence itself, one who denies the providence of God implicitly denies the existence of God.

human act. God's hand in history is to be seen, not in his pre-empting of human responsibility or re-arranging of human events, but in a new order and purpose to things which can retrospectively be appreciated by the insight of faith.

Now how is this all related to the theology of inspiration? Rude people have ever considered it appropriate that contact and converse between God (or gods) and men be attended by wondrous events and prodigies. God could not be imagined to speak without such *éclat*. This is why the early lives of the saints abound in miracles and portents. This is why the oracle at Delphi had to speak in a trance....

Now primitive theology is no monopoly of primitive people. I submit that most of the inspiration theory which this book has reviewed is the heir of this backward notion of inspiration (and of revelation). The dictation idea is long dead and gone, but its corollary has unwittingly been retained. Say that God was the originator of any event, and most believers will immediately feel it must be a perfect event, absolute as he is absolute. Inspiration, as a divinely initiated act, was treated as other divine acts: it was accorded absolute attributes. In this instance the attribute is inerrancy. Further, there is the persistent belief that if God is the author of this book in a way that no other religious document can claim him, somehow he must have tampered with the writing process. Most commentators will insist that if divine causality in Scripture is to be different from ordinary *concursum*, it must somehow have a direct effect upon the dynamics of authorship. But it would be preferable to recognize that what set salvation-acts apart from acts of mere *concursum* are not different procedures, but different results. It is not the writing process of the Bible that differs from that of other books; it is the Bible that is different.²⁵²

Burtchaell thus holds that it was "formerly" thought that God's activity in the world had to be extraordinary, while it is "now" known that God is fully the cause of things even in the ordinary course of events. Thus he concludes that God's authorship of Scripture does not imply that Scripture came to be in an extraordinary manner. But although he is right to say that it is not necessary to say that Scripture came to be in a miraculous manner, he manifests in his own text the same misunderstanding of providence that he condemns in others. This error is manifest in his claim that inerrancy is the corollary of a dictation theory of inspiration. The arguments in the previous parts of this work do not depend upon a theory concerning the manner in which Scripture came to be, but they depend on God's purpose for Scripture, namely, to communicate his own words. Burtchaell himself claims to recognize that Scripture and its purpose are different from other books and their purposes, but he denies the central difference. He denies that Scripture is the word of God. By taking this denial to follow from the denial of the dictation theory, he shows his

²⁵² Burtchaell, 291-294. Karl Rahner's argument against God's literary authorship is an example of the kind of position criticized here by Burtchaell. "For, if God is to be the literary author of the Scriptures, he is, if we may formulate it in this way, a categorical and not a transcendental cause. In other words, his causality itself, and not only its effects, will be within the dimensions in which his creatures live and act. If he is to be the literary author of the Scriptures, and not only their transcendental cause—which in itself would not be sufficient for a literary authorship—then God must be at work within the redemptive dimension of the world, just as in the prophetic inspiration and in the miracle of the Incarnation, both representing activities of God's miraculous character; in a certain sense they in themselves, as actions of God and not only in their effects, possess a spatio-temporal determination. But as God in these cases is the person who originally spoke and acted alone, in the same way we cannot conceive of God otherwise than as the one and only author, who suffers no one else besides himself" [*Inspiration in the Bible* (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1961), 15-16]. Rahner thus holds that God cannot be the literary author of Scripture, because such authorship would exclude human authorship. But Burtchaell quite rightly points out that causing Scripture with a certain purpose and nature would be sufficient for God's authorship, and so nothing must be subtracted from human authorship.

belief that God could only produce his own words by dictation. Thus he falls into the same mistake concerning the providence of God that he recognizes in others.

A certain suggestion of a position implicitly excluding God's existence can also be found in this passage, thus illustrating the connection made above between the denial of God's providence and the denial of God's existence. When he says, "This is why the early lives of the saints abound in miracles and portents," he suggests the position that miracles do not happen, although he does not actually hold this position. This position is implicitly based upon the denial of God's existence.²⁵³

On the other hand, one who recognizes the existence of God and his providence has no trouble asserting the doctrine of inerrancy, while recognizing that the manner in which Scripture came to be is a separate question. The excellence of God's providence is made manifest in this, that he causes men to be true authors of the word of God. Thus he has "bestowed upon man a splendid gift and safeguard—making known to him, by supernatural means, the hidden mysteries of His divinity, His wisdom and His mercy."²⁵⁴

Next the relation between the incarnation of the Word and the inerrancy of Scripture must be considered. Since it is now generally recognized that Christ as presented in the Gospels does indeed claim to be the Son of God, and therefore to be God, men who deny the incarnation obviously also deny the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.²⁵⁵ But not all those who deny the inerrancy of Scripture deny the incarnation. Once again, however, the latter denial is the implicit source for the former denial. The Catechism makes an analogy between the inspiration of Scripture and the incarnation of the Word:

In order to reveal himself to men, in the condescension of his goodness God speaks to them in human words: "Indeed the words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men" (DV 13).

Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely:

You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time (St. Augustine, *En. in Ps.* 103, 4, 1: PL 37, 1378).²⁵⁶

The Catechism makes two points here. The first is that in Scripture the words of God become the words of men, and therefore take on human likeness as the Word takes on human likeness in becoming man. The second is that what is expressed in Scripture is a participation in what is understood in the divine Word. This point is a consequence of the position that the words of Scripture are an expression of the mind of God. The analogy between the incarnation and the

²⁵³ One of the objections to the existence of God is that all things depend upon nature and will, and thus it seems unnecessary to say that God exists (*Summa Theologiae*, I, 2, 3, obj. 1). St. Thomas answers that God is the first cause of nature and will, but one who says that this first cause never acts except through such second causes comes dangerously close to saying that it is not really there at all. Thus Augustine says, "Will some one say that these miracles [in Scripture] are false, that they never happened, and that the records of them are lies? Whoever says so, and asserts that in such matters no records whatever can be credited, may also say that there are no gods who care for human affairs" (*City of God*, X, 18, in NPNF, 1st Series, 2:192).

²⁵⁴ Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, 3.

²⁵⁵ Muslims might be considered a counter-example, but in this case inerrancy is in effect denied by means of the claim that the Bible has undergone substantial alterations, as was implicitly suggested by R. Collins in his objection to Warfield's position.

²⁵⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 101-102.

inspiration of Scripture has been used in two different ways. Pope Pius XII uses this analogy to prove the inerrancy of Scripture:

For just as the substantial Word of God was made like man in all things ‘without sin,’ so also the words of God, expressed in human language, in all things have been made like human speech, without error, which Saint John Chrysostom has already extolled with highest praise as the *syncatabasis*, or, condescension of a provident God; and which he has asserted again and again is the case in the Sacred Scriptures.²⁵⁷

Pius XII teaches that just as the Word became man, but did not take on any defects contrary to the dignity of his person, so divine words are expressed in human language, but do not take on any defects contrary to their divine character, and hence they exclude error. But others hold that this analogy fails. Grillmeier says that this analogy was excluded from the Council’s document due to its inadequacy:

Although this strict parallelism [between the sinlessness of Christ and the inerrancy of Scripture] was expressly desired by some fathers, it was rightly criticized by others and consequently dropped. For—to argue dogmatically—the sinlessness of Christ in his humanity follows from the hypostatic union. Just as the connection of the Church with the Holy Spirit cannot be regarded as a parallel with the divine humanity of Christ, Scripture too, as the word of God in the human word, cannot be seen as a parallel to the incarnation. There is an important analogy between the two, but it is only an analogy. The whole argument was conceived in terms of the problem of the inerrancy of Scripture. The Constitution *Dei Verbum* finally broke through this narrow framework and for this reason dropped the reference to Heb. 4:15. Certainly the incarnation and the inspiration of Scripture are seen as two modes of the condescension of God and his accommodation of himself to us. At the suggestion of Cardinal König the emphasis on this condescension acquired a meaning which was precisely the opposite to that given it in the schema of 1962: it is not the absolute inerrancy of Scripture which is deduced from it, but, on the contrary, the admission that this condescension also accepts the human failings of the writers.²⁵⁸

As in a former case, Grillmeier interprets an absence of a statement in the Council to imply its denial. He does not find the deduction of the inerrancy of Scripture from this analogy in the Council, and therefore says that the Council intends to say that because Scripture takes on a human mode, it must take on error. But in fact nothing at all can be deduced from the absence of a statement in the Council. The lack of a statement is not the denial of the statement. Thus the Council says nothing at all about this question.

Grillmeier claims that this analogy fails because Scripture is not hypostatically united to God. But in fact the reason that the hypostatic union implies the sinlessness of Christ is that the unity of person in Christ implies the possibility of a communication of idioms. What can be said about the man Christ can be said about God. Therefore if the man Christ sinned, then God sinned. But this is impossible. Therefore the man Christ could not sin. Similarly, the unity of the words of Scripture implies the possibility of another communication of idioms. What men said is what God said. Thus what can be said of the words of men can be said of the words of God.²⁵⁹ Thus if the human words of Scripture are false, the divine words are false. But this is impossible. Therefore the human words

²⁵⁷ *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, in Denz. n. 2294.

²⁵⁸ Grillmeier, 227.

²⁵⁹ This must be understood to concern material predication rather than formal predication. It can be said that the man Christ is God, but not that Christ as man is God. Similarly, the human words of Scripture are the words of God, but not insofar as they are human words.

of Scripture cannot be false. Thus there is a complete parallel insofar as each case permits a certain communication of idioms.²⁶⁰

Thus, as was said above, one who denies the inerrancy of Scripture must deny that the words of Scripture are strictly and truly the words of God. This is analogous with the position that the man Christ was not strictly and truly God. Thus these positions can be found combined in such writers as Benedict Spinoza, and the latter denial is the natural foundation for the former denial.

But one who believes that “long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,”²⁶¹ will believe both that Christ was truly the Son of God and that it was indeed God who spoke by the prophets. “No prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”²⁶²

Finally it is necessary to consider the relation between the doctrine of inerrancy and the existence of revelation. One who denies the existence of revelation naturally denies the inerrancy of Scripture. As in the other cases, the denial of the existence of revelation is not an absolutely necessary consequence of the denial of the inerrancy of Scripture, but once again there is a certain connection between the two denials.

One who denies the inerrancy of Scripture must deny that Scripture is strictly and truly the word of God. Thus Scripture cannot be said to contain divine revelation in virtue of itself, but can only be said to contain a record of a former revelation. Similarly, the teaching of the Church, even when infallible, is not a revelation itself, but is an expression of a former revelation. Thus one who denies the inerrancy of Scripture must deny the existence of written revelation. This is not intrinsically impossible, but it is contrary to the Catholic faith and would make the Church’s grasp on revelation extremely tenuous.²⁶³

But this position is often not held so clearly. Often someone will say that Scripture contains errors, but that in some way it is revelation in virtue of itself. The reason given for this is that revelation is imperfect at first and then grows to perfection. Loisy holds a position of this kind:

In fact, it is possible to look upon the Bible no longer as a rule or rather the permanent source of faith, but as a historical document, where the origins and the ancient development of religion can be discovered, a testimony which permits us to understand the state of belief in a certain epoch, which presents it in writings of that same date and that same character.²⁶⁴

This position implicitly attributes falsehood to God, as has been shown before, and also implicitly contains the denial of the infallibility of the Church.

This position implies the denial of the infallibility of the Church for two reasons. First, if the imperfection of revelation allows the existence of errors in revelation itself, Sacred Scripture, then yet more will the imperfection of revelation admit errors into the *expression* of revelation. Thus one will be able to hold that the Church is not infallible because revelation is not yet perfect and therefore still allows for errors. Nor could the Church’s teaching that revelation is now complete disprove this position. If revelation allows errors at any point in its growth, then it is possible that the Church is wrong in its teaching that revelation is perfect, and the reason for the possibility of

²⁶⁰ Pope John Paul II expressly reaffirms the teaching of Pius XII in regard to this analogy, as was cited in an earlier footnote.

²⁶¹ Hebrews 1:1-2.

²⁶² 2 Peter 1:21. The NRSV translation has been slightly adapted here.

²⁶³ Sometimes the name revelation is reserved for those parts of the Bible in which the text expresses new knowledge which was communicated to the sacred author in an extraordinary way. Raymond Brown refers to this when he says, “The traditional position has been that the whole Bible is inspired but only some parts of the Bible transmit revelation” (*The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 7). This “traditional” position did not intend to deny that all the parts of the Bible are strictly and truly the word of God.

²⁶⁴ *Autour d’un petit livre* (Paris: Alphonse Picard & Fils, 1903), 50-51; cited by J. Burtchaell, 237.

this error is that revelation might be still imperfect. Thus the denial of the Church's infallibility is closely connected with the denial of inerrancy. Such a connection is openly asserted by Burtchaell:

Nevertheless inerrancy, whether it has been in any given age stressed or inconsistently pursued, has been a tenet of every age of Catholic belief. It might even be better to call it a working assumption. Like its cousin-tenet, ecclesiastical infallibility, it has not really been probed; it has been taken for granted. A comparison with infallibility is instructive....

In practice, infallibility is invoked as a safety clause in any matter that might threaten the Church's existence. We have quite lately been told that if ever the Church put official endorsement on any teaching, it was on her absolute condemnation of 'artificial' birth prevention. Church authority, it was argued, could collapse were there any reversal here. This sort of theology has been known to backfire. Anyone with a student's exposure to ecclesiastical history can recall, for example, that exactly a century ago Catholics were anathematized for holding that loss of the Papal States might turn out best for the Church. Garibaldi took them away. Church authority survived, to the surprise of some. Others felt it was even enhanced. The birth control issue has probably already been resolved in similarly peremptory fashion, and Church authority will survive even in its humiliation.... In the end, we should probably be more accurate to say that what God has promised his Church is not certitude, but survival.

I have digressed somewhat over ecclesiastical infallibility, for as a dogma it is as much an unprobed working assumption as is biblical inerrancy. The Church is confessed to be the *alter ego* of Christ, and it is quickly assumed that no error can exist in her most official utterances. Likewise the Holy Spirit is declared to have authored the Scriptures, and the inference is smoothly made that the Bible can teach no error.²⁶⁵

Here Burtchaell illustrates the connection asserted above. Since he does not believe in the inerrancy of revelation itself, contained in Sacred Scripture, he can hardly be expected to believe in the infallibility of the Church in its teaching, a mere expression of revelation, rather than revelation itself.

The second reason that the denial of inerrancy implies the denial of the infallibility of the Church can also be seen in this text. The reason is that the Church has taught the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture in a definitive manner, as has been shown in the first major part of this work. Thus one who denies the inerrancy of Scripture must deny the Church's infallibility in order to remain consistent. In this text Burtchaell scornfully rejects the Church's teaching concerning birth control. This sort of denial is to be expected from one who denies the inerrancy of Scripture, since the teaching on birth control has not been taught so strongly as the teaching on the inerrancy of Scripture. If the Church might be wrong about inerrancy, yet more might it be wrong about birth control and similar issues. Thus the denial of the inerrancy of Scripture is connected both theoretically and practically with the denial of the infallibility of the Church, and of any of its particular teachings such as its teaching on birth control.

But it is otherwise with a man who believes these words of Christ:

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Burtchaell, 286-288.

²⁶⁶ Matthew 16:18-19.

Such a man will believe in the infallibility of the Church in its teaching, revelation as handed down by the Church, and perhaps with even greater reverence in the inerrancy of Scripture, written revelation itself.

IV. Epilogue

Cardinal Ratzinger begins his homilies on Genesis by quoting from the beginning of the Bible, and then he proceeds to consider the truth of Scripture.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day. And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day (Genesis 1:1-19).

These words, with which Holy Scripture begins, always have the effect on me of the solemn tolling of a great old bell, which stirs the heart from afar with its beauty and dignity and gives it an inkling of the mystery of eternity. For many of us, moreover, these words recall the memory of our first encounter with God's holy book, the Bible, which was opened for us at this spot. It at once brought us out of our small child's world, captivated us with its poetry, and gave us a feeling for the immeasurability of creation and its Creator.

Yet these words give rise to a certain conflict. They are beautiful and familiar, but are they also true? Everything seems to speak against it, for science has long since disposed of the concepts that we have just now heard—the idea of a world that is completely comprehensible in terms of space and time, and the idea that creation was built up piece by piece over the course of seven days. Instead of this we now face measurements that transcend all comprehension. Today we hear of the Big Bang, which happened billions of years ago and with which the universe began its

expansion—an expansion that continues to occur without interruption. And it was not in neat succession that the stars were hung and the green of the fields created; it was rather in complex ways and over vast periods of time that the earth and the universe were constructed as we now know them.

Do these words, then, count for anything? In fact a theologian said not long ago that creation has now become an unreal concept. If one is to be intellectually honest one ought to speak no longer of creation but rather of mutation and selection. Are these words true? Or have they perhaps, along with the entire Word of God and the whole biblical tradition, come out of the reveries of the infant age of human history, for which we occasionally experience homesickness but to which we can nevertheless not return, inasmuch as we cannot live on nostalgia? Is there an answer to this that we can claim for ourselves in this day and age?²⁶⁷

There is indeed an answer to this. These words are indeed true. These words are true for this age and for every age.

²⁶⁷ *'In the Beginning...'*, 1-4, trans. Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995).

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