

Inerrancy and Love: a Theological Exercise of Interpreting the Resistance of the Bible to Interpretation in Modern Thinking.

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ABSTRACT

Recent research on Biblical criticism, highlighting certain controversial parts in the Bible, reveal that there is a wide range of conflicting interpretations with regard to Holy Scripture. As a consequence of these, the notion of inerrancy has been revisited, the Scriptures' supernatural character has been examined and their degree of reliability has been re-evaluated. In what follows, I will analyse a series of theological views which are more or less close to the twenty-five inerrantist theses formulated at Chicago in 1978, with the purpose that, in the end, based on the Biblical concept of divine love, I will propose a succinct interpretation affirming the divinity and humanity of Scripture.

KEY WORDS: Biblical Criticism, interpretation, inerrancy, canon, authority of Scripture.

In 1978, 26-28 October, near Chicago, there was a meeting of over 200 American theologians organised by *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy* with the purpose of expressing their support regarding the inerrancy of the Scriptures.² The concept of Biblical inerrancy was expounded and explained in the following four treatments, as Norman L. Geisler points out: “(1) The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (by the ICBI drafting committee, 1978); (2) The Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, by Dr. Sproul; (3) The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (by the ICBI drafting committee, 1982); (4) The Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, by Dr. Geisler.”³ According to The Chicago Statement and, subsequent to the ensuing commentaries, the Bible, namely the 66 canonical books, is “in its entirety inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.”⁴

Geisler, one of the active participants in the Chicago Statement, repeatedly emphasized that there is a historical consent among the prominent theologians belonging to various Christian traditions with respect to the infallible nature of

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² Norman L. Geisler, Christopher T. Haun, eds. *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy, Official Commentary on the ICBI Statements, Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy by Dr. R. C. Sproul (1980), Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics by Dr. Norman L. Geisler (1983)* (Matthews, N. C: Bastion Books, 2013), 22.

³ Article XII apud. Geisler and Haun, eds., *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 6.

⁴ Article XII apud. Geisler and Haun, eds., *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 10.

the Biblical content. According to a selection of texts made by Geisler, Clement of Rome reckons the Scripture is the true expression of the Holy Spirit; subsequently, there is nothing counterfeit in it.⁵ For Justin Martyr, the Scripture has its origin in the Divine Word.⁶ Irenaeus believes that the Scriptures are perfect, and their human authors “are above all falsehood.”⁷ Tertullian points out the harmony of the Biblical books, considering the Gospels which, although they are four, are one.⁸ The Bible is not a human composition, for Origen, but divine, being inspired by the Holy Spirit.⁹ All good things are caused by God, the Scripture is caused primarily, Clement of Alexandria considers, whereas philosophy is caused consequently.¹⁰

Interested in the way the revelation occurred, Augustine states that God “commanded the disciples, His hands, to write.”¹¹ The Eastern theologian endorsed the authoritative, divine nature, the historical contents, the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scripture: “I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error.”¹² Thomas Aquinas, engaged on the project of not leaving any biblical notion deprived of intelligibility and meaning, affirms that the canonical Bible has God as author, and that the former is utterly flawless.¹³ Even Martin Luther, the originator of the reformation, confirms at once the divine nature of the canonical writings, the fact that the Scripture is authoritative, infallible and inerrant, that it reveals Christ and is self-consistent.¹⁴ John Calvin, is among those who affirm the divine origin of the Bible, the authoritative nature and the inerrant content of the original manuscripts,¹⁵ and certain MSS issues, like the one in Matthew 27:9, are most probably assigned to scribes.¹⁶

Geisler includes in this list the representatives of the school in Princeton, Archibald Alexander Hodge and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. They both claim that taking into account its origin, the Bible is God’s infallible Word, self-consistent, valid from the historical and scientific points of view, which is not,

⁵ Norman Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy, The Historical Evidence* (Matthews: Bastion Books, 2013) electronic edition, 37.

⁶ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 38.

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.5.1. apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 41.

⁸ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 46.

⁹ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 46.

¹⁰ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 52.

¹¹ Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospel*, 1.35.54. apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 58.

¹² Augustine, *Letters*, 82.1.3. apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 64.

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.1.1., 1.1.10, 1.6.1., *Job* 13. Lect. 1., apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 67-68.

¹⁴ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 71-81.

¹⁵ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 83-87.

¹⁶ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 87.

however, automatically dictated, but verbally inspired and, consequently, inerrant and reliable.¹⁷

Geisler identifies those he called “modern liberal theologians,” represented by Harold Dewolf and Harry Emerson Fosdick, who adopted the anti-supernaturalist hermeneutical horizon of Benedict Spinoza, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel and Martin Heidegger.¹⁸ These theologians deny the divine origin of the Bible, highlighting both the fallible nature of its human authors, but also, mostly its errant character. Dewolf emphasizes, therefore, that “[t]o the intelligent student who is more concerned with seeking out and declaring the truth than with maintaining a dogma it must be apparent that the Bible is by no means infallible.”¹⁹ He also refers to the differences between Exodus 37:1-9 and Deuteronomy 10:1-5, 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1, evoking at the same time a certain internal inconsistency between the books mentioned and the necessity of admitting what are considered by some as scientific errors.²⁰ Fosdick contributes to the same perspective pointing out that the Bible is fallible and errant²¹, written and rewritten through subsequent contributions, as it results, for example, from Exodus 6:2-3,²² which he perceives as characterized by an insurmountable inconsistency,²³ and a lack of love.²⁴ As regards the concept of process theology, Geisler makes clear the implications engendered by this theology: the Bible is not God’s Word, it does not constitute a functional authority, the revelation is not supernatural, and the prophecy is not predictive. By contrast to this liberal approach, the fundamental theology, is represented by John R. Rice who, Geisler explains, affirms that God revealed the Scripture word by word, sketching out in a providential way both the vocabulary and the style that were going to be used in writing by its human authors.²⁵ Karl Barth’s and Emil Brunner’s thinking, both being exponents of neo-orthodoxy, “may be understood as a reaction against liberalism, but also as a refusal to return to an orthodox view of the Bible.”²⁶ Barth considers that the Bible *contains* God’s Word, which entails, though, contradictions, cultural accommodation, scientific errors. The authors of its construction are “sinful in their action, and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written

¹⁷ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 91-102.

¹⁸ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 104.

¹⁹ Harold Dewolf, “A Theology of the Living Church,” 68, apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 108.

²⁰ Harold Dewolf, “Living Church,” 69, apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 108-109.

²¹ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 113.

²² Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 113.

²³ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 116.

²⁴ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 113.

²⁵ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 141.

²⁶ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 143.

word.”²⁷ Brunner draws attention to the danger of considering that the Bible is God’s word.²⁸ He maintains that the Bible appears as a human writing the same way as God – descended in history – appears to us as a man.²⁹ The thousands of contradictions highlighted by literary criticism, Brunner affirms, which are prevalent both in the Old and New Testament, create the feeling that the Bible is “completely overthrown.”³⁰ Therefore, Geisler concludes:

Neo-orthodoxy rejects the orthodox view of an infallible and inerrant Bible. The Bible is not a propositional revelation. Instead, the Bible witnesses to and records God’s revelation in the person of Christ. The Bible is not the Word of God but “becomes the Word of God to us when we meet Christ through it. Barth admits the possibility of errors in Scripture; Brunner acknowledges thousands of them.”³¹

Nevertheless, there is a liberal – evangelical perspective which comprises both liberal and evangelical viewpoints, pointed out by the author of the compilation.³² A representative of the liberal – evangelical approach is C. S. Lewis. According to the latter, the human intermediaries of the revelation distort, in fact, sometimes rudely, its content.³³ The same way as God did not transform Himself into a man, but He assumed a human body, likewise, God’s revelation, Lewis suggests, did not transform into literature, but took on a literature in order to communicate the divine word.³⁴ Both the revelation and canonization of the sacred writings, their drafting and editing, sometimes with certain changes, are all together, Lewis proposes, providentially organized by God.³⁵ The nature of the Bible, Lewis considers, quoting St. Jerome and Calvin, is partly authoritative and objectively fallible³⁶, containing “historical limitations”, “errors and

²⁷ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics*, 1:2.529 apud Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 150.

²⁸ Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, trans. O. Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), 118.

Apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 151.

²⁹ Emil Brunner, *The Word of God and Modern Man*, trans. D. Cairns (Richmond: John Knox, 1964), 32.

Apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 152.

³⁰ Emil Brunner, *God and Man*, 36, Apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 155.

³¹ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 165.

³² Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 168.

³³ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 114, apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 168.

³⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 116, apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 169.

³⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 111, apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 171.

³⁶ Cited in M. J. Christensen, C. S. Lewis on Scripture (Waco: Word, 1979), 98-99, and C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 109, apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 172-173.

contradictions”, and “antireligious portions”.³⁷ Again, the authorship of the Psalms is often uncertain, as is the historical nature of the description of the creation. In spite of these things, “God must have done what is best, this is best, therefore God has done this. For we are mortals and do not know what is best for us, and it is dangerous to prescribe what God must have done—especially when we cannot for the life of us, see that He has after all done it.”³⁸

The last perspective pointed out by Geisler is that of neo – evangelicalism which implies that “the Bible is not infallible divine words but only reliable human words.”³⁹ And this is due to the fact that “[t]he Bible is a human witness to divine revelation.”⁴⁰ In conclusion, Geisler considers that there is a historical unity concerning the acknowledgement of the inerrancy of the Scripture, which has been preserved for nineteen centuries, and which underwent changes only in the eighteenth century, with the adoption of the anti-supernaturalist philosophical horizon.⁴¹

Scriptures as human creation

Certain critical perspectives of the Biblical content were initially anchored in Baruch Spinoza’s writings, a Sephardic Jew, a student of Bacon, Hobbes and Giordano Bruno, educated both in the study of the canonical Hebrew writings, and in metaphysical works and Cartesian scientific development.⁴² The way the prophets received the divine revelation was through the vivid power of their imperfect imagination, according to their particular temperament and opinions,⁴³ and is distinct from concrete revelation by means of the mediated reception of the words, as was the unique case with Moses, who talked to God “face to face”.⁴⁴ Also, the Spirit that enlivened them was, in fact, the skill of their human mind, and the prophetic content is not based on definite truth, but more on manifest signs.⁴⁵ Similarly, the epistles of the NT apostles, in Spinoza’s opinion, scrupulously quoting from the sacred writings, “were not written by revelation and Divine command, but merely by the natural powers and judgment of the

³⁷ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 176-179.

³⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 111, apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 112, apud. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 111, apud. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 171.

³⁹ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 208.

⁴⁰ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 209.

⁴¹ Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy*, 211, 212.

⁴² R. H. M. Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, vol. I., Introduction, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, *Tractatus Politicus*, Revised Edition (London: George Bell and Sons, York Street, Covent Garden), 1891, xxii.

⁴³ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 27, 30.

⁴⁴ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 18-19, 25.

⁴⁵ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 20 and 24.

authors.”⁴⁶ The latter wrote, he says, “in light of natural reason.”⁴⁷ The fundamental issue which underlies Spinoza’s “Tractatus Theologico – Politicus” is: “Scripture should be made sub-servient to reason, or reason to Scripture”⁴⁸ Spinoza chooses to side with reason, though, because theology promotes submission without understanding, and reason promotes truth and wisdom, thus, the conclusion of the philosopher is that “the Bible must not be accommodated to reason, nor reason to the Bible.”⁴⁹ If, however, the Bible were submitted to the scrutiny of reason, a fact which is eventually undesirable, as reason is interested in revealing truth, then contradictions and inconsistencies would come out of it.

The concept of reason and Scripture as parallel objectives⁵⁰ places the philosopher in opposition to Jehuda Alpakhar and led him to present a series of controversial Biblical references, such as 1 Samuel 15:29 and Jeremiah 18:8-10, which concern the issue of God changing his mind.⁵¹ The biblical data which narrate Moses’s death, could not have been edited exactly by him. Then the reference to Moses using the third person,⁵² the sentence “and the Canaanite was then in the land”⁵³ and the phrase “the Mountain of the Lord” in Genesis 22:14 related to mount Moriah,⁵⁴ made Spinoza affirm that these texts were written only after the construction of the Temple. Also, the fact that the land of Bashan that belonged to giants was associated with the land of Judah, of which Moses would not have been aware, as the partition of the conquered territory took place subsequent to his death, made Spinoza consider that the text was edited after the death of Moses. The reference from Genesis 14:14 regarding Abraham’s pursuit of the defeated enemies to Dan, seems to need an explanation, since the settlement of Dan was named by Dan’s sons during the Judges’ time, as it is mentioned in Judges 18:29.

Taking into account that in the canonical Pentateuch there is reference to “God’s lawbook” (Deut. 1:5, 29:14, 31:9, Joshua 24:25-26), Spinoza proposes that this writing was irrecoverably lost, or its whole content was considerably altered.⁵⁵ He states, “We may therefore conclude that the book of the law of God which

⁴⁶ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 159.

⁴⁷ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 161.

⁴⁸ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 190.

⁴⁹ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 195.

⁵⁰ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 198. According to Spinoza, reason deals with truth, and Scriptures with submission in love. Given the fact that man needs both truth and love, both reason and Scriptures must be found within fundamental human interests.

⁵¹ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 194.

⁵² Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 121.

⁵³ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 122.

⁵⁴ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 122.

⁵⁵ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 125.

Moses wrote was not the Pentateuch, but something quite different, which the author of the Pentateuch duly inserted into his book.”⁵⁶ Spinoza also claims that, for similar reasons, the book of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings underwent certain amendments along with editing.⁵⁷

Spinoza expresses his point of view regarding the Scripture saying that even if its content “may be supposed to have been altered many times”⁵⁸, the former is nevertheless God’s word, being neither mendacious, nor imperfect, nor corrupt.”⁵⁹ For the Jewish philosopher, a work is mendacious, flawed or corrupt only when the text is deprived of any intelligible message or meaning. However, Spinoza asserts, “from Scripture we learn, without any kind of difficulty or ambiguity, that its sum is this, — to love God above all, and our neighbour as ourselves.”⁶⁰

Total Inerrancy

The topic of inerrancy is very important for evangelicals since, as Albert Mohler maintains, “[w]ithout inerrancy, the evangelical movement will inevitably become dissolute and indistinct in its faith and doctrines and increasingly confused about the very nature and authority of its message.”⁶¹ The very survival of evangelicals, Mohler continues, depends on the total acknowledgement of Scripture’s inerrancy: “I will make my position plain. I do not believe that evangelicalism can survive without the explicit and complete assertion of biblical inerrancy.”⁶²

Mohler believes that the argument for Biblical inerrancy engages “three major sources – the Bible itself, the tradition of the church, and the function of the Bible within the church.”⁶³ According to 2 Peter 1:21, 2 Timothy 3:16, 1

⁵⁶ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 126.

⁵⁷ Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, 127.

⁵⁸ Benedict De Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, A Critical Inquiry Into the History, Purpose and Authenticity of the Hebrew Scripture; With the Right to Free Thought and Free Discussion Asserted, and Shown to be Not Only Consistent but Necessarily Bound Up With True Piety and Good Government [...] From the Latin. With the Introduction and Notes By the Editor* (London: Trubner and CO., Paternoster Row, John Childs and Sons, Printers, 1862), 236.

⁵⁹ Benedict De Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 236.

⁶⁰ Benedict De Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 237.

⁶¹ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, R. Albert Mohler Jr., Peter Enns, Michael F. Bird, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, John R. Franke (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013), 42.

⁶² J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 43.

⁶³ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 53.

Thessalonians 2:13, the doctrine of inerrancy is established on “the fact that God determined the very words of the Bible in the original text.”⁶⁴ God is perfect and flawless, therefore, “If the Scriptures are the very breath of God, their perfect inspiration implies and requires that they are without error.”⁶⁵ Historically, the doctrine of inerrancy, the Baptist theologian affirms, has been unanimously endorsed by theologians throughout the centuries,⁶⁶ its denial gaining a foothold merely in the twentieth century. Analysing Warfield, Mohler backs up his position, pointing out the fact that the doctrine of inerrancy, as any other doctrine, raises “certain intellectual difficulties”⁶⁷; however, it is doubtful that its rejection makes the problem more simple. Along with M. Boice, Mohler stresses the essential role that the Bible plays in the life of the church, saying that “faithful preaching depends on the truthfulness and trustworthiness of every word of the Bible.”⁶⁸ Concerning the interpretation of the Biblical texts, including the controversial ones, Mohler affirms that the Bible is inerrant, consequently, it is not the Biblical text that is likely to have intrinsic problems, but the act of interpretation. He answers to the objection that the inerrancy-based hermeneutics is a priori by showcasing that the secularist phenomenology also engages a hermeneutic that has a number of assumptions.⁶⁹ Referring to the difference between Acts 9:7 and 22:9, Mohler argues that they are perfectly complementary: “In Acts 9:7, Paul’s associates are said to hear the voice but to see no one. In Acts 22:9, they see the light but do not understand the voice [...] Paul’s associates heard the voice without understanding and saw the light without seeing the appearance of Christ.”⁷⁰ With respect to the difference between the divine mandate to exterminate in Deuteronomy 20 and the mandate to love in Matthew 5:43-48, Mohler concludes “the divine ordering of death for the Canaanites is a stark reminder of the divine verdict of death upon all humanity, apart from Christ.”⁷¹

⁶⁴ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 54.

⁶⁵ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 58.

⁶⁶ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 60.

⁶⁷ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 61.

⁶⁸ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 63.

⁶⁹ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 79.

⁷⁰ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 81-82.

⁷¹ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 88.

The Scripture's incarnation

Peter Enns holds that the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy cannot facilitate a rigorous account of the compositional manner of the Scripture as a work of literature created in ancient cultural space.⁷² He suggests that the attempt to reconcile, for instance, the order to exterminate the Canaanites in the Old Testament with the command to love overabundantly in the New Testament is difficult, not to say impossible, should we take into account the principle of inerrancy.⁷³ On the other hand, inerrancy “is an a priori and prescriptive doctrine.”⁷⁴ Therefore, “inerrancy regularly functions to short-circuit rather than spark our knowledge of the Bible.”⁷⁵ More precisely, “inerrancy prematurely shuts down rigorous inquiry into what the Bible’s ‘truthfulness’ means, and so interrupts rather than fosters careful reading of Scripture.”⁷⁶

Enns states that the doctrine of the Biblical inerrancy, due to the precisionist emphasis placed mainly on the perfect nature of the Bible, obscures the possibility of noticing “the more interesting, spiritually edifying, and lovely topic of what kind of a God we have, one who is willing to speak within the limitations of his audience.”⁷⁷ On the other hand, “[i]nerrancy also prevents us from coming to terms with ourselves”⁷⁸, in the sense that by refusing to accept the finitude of the Biblical text, the former overlooks the limited cultural context of the modern reader, making the application of the Biblical message in the latter’s daily life impossible. Finally, Enns promotes a reidentification of the approach to the Bible’s text, starting from the “incarnational metaphor” according to which, the Bible is “a variety of writings that necessarily and unashamedly reflects the worlds in which those writings were produced.”⁷⁹ Although, as he states elsewhere, the belief “that the Bible is ultimately from God and that it is God’s gift to the church”⁸⁰ is correct. One can deduce that

⁷² J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 150.

⁷³ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 186.

⁷⁴ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 187.

⁷⁵ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 151.

⁷⁶ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 151.

⁷⁷ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 151.

⁷⁸ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 151.

⁷⁹ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 190.

⁸⁰ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation, Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), E-book Edition created 2011, 13.

“*inerrancy* has run its course and that evangelicals need to adopt other language with which to talk about the Bible.”⁸¹ The language that Enns proposes is that of the Incarnational Analogy, according to which, the Scripture is human and divine, the same way as Jesus Christ is human and divine at the same time.⁸² The signs of the Scripture’s humanity are the common language through which it expresses, the ancient culture that it imitates, the prophetic practice common to the ancient Mesopotamian world, the mimetic governing of Israel and the legal system based on legal codes, such as the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi.⁸³ The human aspects of the Scripture, in Enns’s words, “lack integrity.”⁸⁴

Inerrancy of the Cross

Kevin J. Vanhoozer insists on relating constantly to the articles in the Chicago Statement, employing instruments of critical analysis towards the former, and also highlighting the theological value and real role that they have in the Americophile evangelical space. Nevertheless, after he makes sure that he reveals the fact that the Scripture holds “its own standards of truth, figures of speech, and literary forms,”⁸⁵ he expresses his adherence, this time without any reserve, to an article of CSBI, which, he thinks, corresponds to the “*inerrancy of the cross*”⁸⁶, namely, that the “Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.”⁸⁷

An irreconcilable literature

Unlike Vanhoozer, Michael F. Bird fits the doctrine of *inerrancy* only in American theological space. Therefore, Bird considers, *inerrancy* “should not be a universally prescriptive article of faith for the global evangelical church.”⁸⁸ The objection that one can raise is that not only American Christians and their theologians are interested in decoding the difficult passages in the Bible, but Christians in other parts of the world are as well. There is the social-cultural and

⁸¹ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 190.

⁸² Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation, Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, 21.

⁸³ Peter Enns, *inspiration and Incarnation*, 25.

⁸⁴ Peter Enns, *inspiration and Incarnation*, 288.

⁸⁵ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 365.

⁸⁶ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 365.

⁸⁷ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 365.

⁸⁸ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 248.

technological phenomenon of globalization where socialization networks. Internet and YouTube facilitate theological information and doctrinal debate that include aspects which deal with the issue of Biblical inerrancy. People from all parts of the world participate, in one way or another, to this debate. This means that non-American Christians are not outside of it.

Bird claims that there are texts such as Matt. 20:29–34; Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43 which are irreconcilable. One may, however, take into consideration, on the one hand, that the event narrated by Luke, Jesus’s entrance into Jericho, could be on a different date than the event related by Matthew and Mark. On the other hand, Matthew may depict the same event as Mark, when Jesus left Jericho, but there is no necessity to say that he “conjures up” the existence of two blind men who get to be healed, whereas Mark restrains the focal point of his story, emphasizing the fact that a blind man, one of the two, very likely, benefits from his faith in the Messiah, the Son of David, by experiencing salvation as well, which is why the Evangelist feels compelled to point him out, disclosing his name, i.e., Bartimaeus, to his readers. Therefore, it is desirable that, before jumping out of the ship as soon as somebody yells that it is sinking, we check if things are indeed such. In other words, we will not accept the notion of falsehood while there are other possible explanations. The same principle should be applied in the case of the difference between Acts 9:7 and 22:9, without jumping to the conclusion that “[t]he details seem a bit hazy as to what Paul’s companions did or did not see, probably because the details were hazy in Paul’s own mind.”⁸⁹

Incomprehensibility of the Scriptures

John R. Franke promotes the pluralism of theological knowledge: “The plurality and flexibility of particular vocabularies provide a pointed reminder of the perspectival nature of language itself.”⁹⁰ The epistemology on which his postfoundationalist,⁹¹ pluralist viewpoint is based is that of the incomprehensibility of the truth: “As finite creatures, we are not able to grasp the truth as God, who is truth, knows that truth to be.”⁹² The questions raised are for example: If we insist that we cannot know the truth, then we cannot be sure of the truth that we care about, even if it is called postfoundationalist, and, if however there are clues that something is true and acknowledged as such, then we cannot claim that we are not able to grasp the truth. On the other hand, how

⁸⁹ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 286.

⁹⁰ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 472.

⁹¹ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 464.

⁹² J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 471.

can we say that we know only fragments of truth if we do not have the unfragmented, entire picture of it? And how do we know that a certain fragment of truth is not, in fact, the whole truth? Franke provides answers to these questions saying that “by virtue of the grace of divine revelation, we are able to know something about reality even if we cannot know it exhaustively or perfectly.”⁹³

How can we explain the fact that many Christians have the knowledge “by the virtue of grace” but there is less consensus among them about the Bible? Or, alternatively, since “truth is characterized by plurality”⁹⁴, and not every interpretive expression is true, then how can we know what is true and false or untrue? Should there be a valid universal criterion, then postfoundationalism would not be true, and if there is no criterion, we are held captive by a mystical hermeneutic of the “anything goes” type.

However, Franke continues by revealing that the Scripture, as a whole, is a map which, without having the merit of being precise, leads us correctly in the right direction: “Scripture functions like a map that effectively guides our journey into the mission of God. It pragmatically points us in the right direction without the necessity of being photographically precise or drawn exactly to scale.”⁹⁵ For Franke, the human involvement is intrinsically fallible. Therefore, “inerrancy functions only within the limits of language alone.”⁹⁶ The divine and human contribution to the revelation remain distinct and unmistakable just in order to avoid the idolatrous action of worshipping the Scripture’s human aspect.

A World of Contradictions

This analysis cannot overlook the secularist approach to the Bible advocated by Bart D. Ehrman. He argues in favour of the idea that the Bible is “A World of Contradictions.”⁹⁷ Ehrman underlines the fact that supplementing the “vertical” Bible reading with the “horizontal” one leads to emphasizing the differences between the reported narrations. He claims, “[r]eading the Gospels horizontally reveals all sorts of differences and discrepancies.”⁹⁸ For instance, Mark 14:12

⁹³ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 475.

⁹⁴ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 486.

⁹⁵ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 473.

⁹⁶ J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, general eds., Stanley N. Gundry, series ed., *Five views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 476.

⁹⁷ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted, Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible, and Why We Don't know about them* (New York: Harper One, HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 19.

⁹⁸ Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted*, 21.

and 15:25 tell us that Jesus was seized on the day of the Feast of Azymes, when they sacrificed the passover, or the “day before the Sabbath” (Mark 15:42), namely Friday, and He was crucified at “the third hour” (nine o’clock), whereas in John 19:14 we find out that Jesus was tried and crucified on the preparation of the Passover, the day when lambs were slain in the temple. So, Ehrman claims, one day before the Feast of Azymes, in fact on Thursday, the historian affirms, and Jesus was brought to be judged by Pilate at six o’clock (twelve o’clock).⁹⁹ Ehrman, even though he is aware of the explanation that John would have related the crucifixion to another Jewish calendar which celebrated the Passover differently from the official calendar, thinks that the difference between these two Gospels which relate the same event is irreconcilable.

Helen K. Bond makes reference to one of M. H. Shepherd’s proposals regarding the existence of two calendars, a priestly one, which was circulating in Judea, approved by John, and another one agreed by Mark due to reasons related to the church where he was ministering, found in the Roman cultural space.¹⁰⁰ It is possible that both, Mark and John, relate crucifixion to a day which is immediately succeeded by the Sabbath day (Mark 15:42 and John 19:31). Or, another hypothesis is the theory of two Sabbaths according to which Mark might have referred to a Sabbath as it is set out in Leviticus 6:29-31; 23:24-32, 39.

Ehrman brings up other texts that are also highly controversial, and eventually he underscores three conclusions regarding the nature of the differences between the Gospels: firstly, “they show that the view of the Bible as completely inerrant appears not to be true”¹⁰¹; secondly, no matter what the presupposed degree of contradiction between the Bible’s authors may be, it is “important to let each other author speak for himself and not pretend that he is saying the same thing as another.”¹⁰² And thirdly, “[t]he discrepancies that involve historical narratives [...] make it difficult to establish what really happened”¹⁰³

The Bible is true at a deeper level

Unlike Ehrman, Peter J. Williams has an inerrant – heuristical approach to difficult texts: “But these formal contradictions do show that the author is more interested in encouraging people to read deeply than in satisfying those who want to find fault.”¹⁰⁴ Difficulty is meant to engage even more the reader’s curiosity

⁹⁹ Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted*, 23-27.

¹⁰⁰ Helen Bond, (2013). “Dating the Death of Jesus: Memory and the Religious Imagination.” *New Testament Studies*, 59(04), 461-475, 3.

¹⁰¹ Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted*, 59.

¹⁰² Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted*, 59-60.

¹⁰³ Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted*, 60.

¹⁰⁴ Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018), 127.

for the very purpose of helping him to discover some novel and useful Biblical information. Particularly, Williams states that “[h]ere the author of John’s Gospel has recorded *contradictions at the superficial level of language* to encourage the audience to think more deeply.”¹⁰⁵ For Williams, the contradictions in the Bible are deliberate, a fact which makes both seemingly antagonistic positions of certain texts be “true in some way at a deeper level.”¹⁰⁶ Williams notices, in conclusion, the fact that the problematical texts in the Gospels have the potential to be solved: “For all the many contradictions that have been alleged in the Gospels, and for all the texts that remain puzzling, I do not know of any that cannot possibly be resolved.”¹⁰⁷

Scriptures, a collection of books pertaining to their time

Michael R. Licona does not share the same viewpoint. Examining Plutarch’s *Lives*, he reaches the conclusion that the ancient historian uses a series of stylistic-literary methods which form, what Licona calls “compositional devices.” These devices are the following: *transferral*, “when an author knowingly attributes words or deeds to a person that actually belonged to another person. ...”¹⁰⁸; *displacement*, “an author knowingly uproots an event from its original context”¹⁰⁹; *conflation*, “[w]hen an author combines elements from two or more events or people and narrates them as one”¹¹⁰; *compression*, “[w]hen an author knowingly portrays events over a shorter period of time than the actual time it took for those events to occur”¹¹¹; *spotlighting*, “[w]hen an author focuses attention on a person [...] whereas mention of others who were likewise involved is neglected”¹¹²; *simplification*, “[w]hen an author adapts material by omitting or altering details”¹¹³; *expansion of narrative details*, “if minor details were unknown, they could be invented to improve the narrative”¹¹⁴ and *paraphrasing*.

Licona insists on affirming that the Gospels in the New Testament “bear a strong affinity to Greco-Roman biography”¹¹⁵, this fact leading him to the thesis that “evangelists employ many of the same compositional devices that were taught

¹⁰⁵ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 127.

¹⁰⁶ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 127.

¹⁰⁷ Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 127.

¹⁰⁸ Michael R. Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What we Can Learn from Ancient Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 20.

¹⁰⁹ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 20.

¹¹⁰ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 20.

¹¹¹ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 20.

¹¹² Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 20.

¹¹³ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 20.

¹¹⁴ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 5.

in the compositional textbooks and others that were employed by Plutarch”¹¹⁶ Thus, Licona gets to say things which hardly converge with the doctrinal objectives and content of the Chicago Statement. Here is an example: “John may have altered the day and time of Jesus’s crucifixion”¹¹⁷ “Either Luke displaces an event or Mark//Matthew alters details”¹¹⁸. “Mark alters a question to a command,”¹¹⁹ and “Matthew or John relocated an appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene.”¹²⁰ Such chosen examples illustrate sufficiently Licona’s belief that the authors of the Gospels sometimes resort to stylistic devices, for obviously rhetorical reasons, such as *simplification*, the effect of which is to introduce the idea that the Biblical authors make up events that are not backed up by a given historical reality.

The High Reliability of the Scriptures

Lydia McGrew objects to the literary device theory employed by Licona, drawing attention to the fact that, however, “an alteration of fact is fictionalization.”¹²¹ By fictionalization, McGrew understands three things: 1. “The real facts have been altered”¹²²; 2. “The alteration of fact was made by the author deliberately”¹²³; 3. “The alteration of fact is invisible to the audience”¹²⁴ McGrew draws attention to the fact that, when we give place to the literary device theory, we agree that the authors of the Gospels assumed the liberty to “retouch” their stories “using fictionalizing literary devices.” But this means that historical writings lose their historicity, and the epistemical effect is “a serious one.”¹²⁵ In accepting “alterations suggested by the literary device theorists”¹²⁶, McGrew considers, the biographies of the Gospels will not be a mirror which will show us the image “of the Master by the natural process of historical reporting”¹²⁷, but, on the contrary, become in effect, a “mask upon the historical Jesus.”¹²⁸ Following William Paley’s apologetic methodology, according to which the authors of the New Testament were either deceivers, or deceived, or they tell the truth, McGrew aims to highlight the coincidences within the Gospels, and those between Acts and the Epistles, calling them “undesigned

¹¹⁶ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 199.

¹¹⁷ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 167.

¹¹⁸ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 167.

¹¹⁹ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 134.

¹²⁰ Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 182.

¹²¹ Lydia McGrew, *The Mirror or the Mask, Liberating the Gospels From Literary Devices*, (Florida, Tampa: DeWard Publishing Company Ltd., 2019), Kindle Edition, 29.

¹²² McGrew, *The Mirror or the Mask*, 29.

¹²³ McGrew, *The Mirror or the Mask*, 30.

¹²⁴ McGrew, *The Mirror or the Mask*, 30.

¹²⁵ McGrew, *The Mirror or the Mask*, 31.

¹²⁶ McGrew, *The Mirror or the Mask*, 36.

¹²⁷ McGrew, *The Mirror or the Mask*, 36.

¹²⁸ McGrew, *The Mirror or the Mask*, 36.

coincidences”¹²⁹, for the very reason of reaching the premise that the writings mentioned are characterized by “high reliability, the absence of any deliberate fictionalization, and close apostolic origin”¹³⁰ and, thus, to point out that the authors of the Gospels and Acts tell the truth.

The confluent divine-human revelation

William Lane Craig, analysing the correspondence between Jean Le Clerc, a Dutch theologian, and Spinoza, adopts an approach to inspiration which “is understood in terms of direction, not dictation,”¹³¹ and which implies the idea that “God has already accommodated Himself to speaking in the languages of Hebrew and Greek and has thus limited His expression to what the grammar and vocabulary of those languages permit.”¹³² This approach supports the interpretation that “There is then one author of Scripture, God, and one stenographer, man, to whom God dictates Scripture in a vernacular that makes it indistinguishable from the writer’s own expression.”¹³³ If, nevertheless, the Scriptures were not the outcome of the divine-human confluence, then God would be the only author, and “inerrancy would be unproblematic”. Craig says:

*1. The words of the Bible are the product of free human activity. 2. Human activities (such as penning a book) can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom. 3. God totally controlled what human authors did in fact write. 4. Therefore, the words of the Bible are God’s utterance. 5. Whatever God utters is errorless. 6. Therefore, the words of the Bible are errorless.*¹³⁴

The most problematical premise is number 2, because it evokes the paradox that God controls man completely without violating, though, his human freedom. How is this possible? Well, Craig explains it by appealing to the doctrine of middle knowledge suggested by the Jesuit Spanish theologian, Luis Molina (1535-1600), who analyses the knowledge of God under the aspect of its three logical moments.

¹²⁹ Lydia McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View, Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts* (Ohio, Chillicothe: DeWard Publishing Company Ltd., 2017), 13.

¹³⁰ McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View*, 226.

¹³¹ William Lane Craig, “Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration,” Reasonable Faith with William Lane Craig, Used by permission of Philosophia Christi NS 1 (1999): 45-82, accessed January, 22, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/divine-omni-science/men-moved-by-the-holy-spirit-spoke-from-god-2-peter-1.21-a-middle-knowledge/>.

¹³² Craig, “Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration”.

¹³³ Craig, “Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration”.

¹³⁴ Craig, “Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration”.

The “natural knowledge,” the knowing of God since eternity, comprises in its horizon all that is likely to happen, regarding both individual essences, and all possible worlds, more exactly, “by His natural knowledge God knew what any free creature *could* do in any set of circumstances.”¹³⁵ The second knowledge is that of the world and actual things. According to this knowledge, God knows all the actual things and all their causes minutely. However, God also owns a knowledge of what could happen under unimaginable circumstances: a “knowledge of all true counterfactual propositions, including counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. That is to say, He knows what contingent states of affairs would obtain if certain antecedent states of affairs were to obtain”.¹³⁶ This is the third type of knowledge, God’s middle knowledge. The latter represents the basis according to which God updates the world as He knows it from eternity, but God can create, for the benefit of the free human agents, the necessary background in which they can act in a certain direction, leaving them the freedom of choice. This freedom is guaranteed to them by the possibility of choice.

The objection that one can raise against this theory is that, since God, who is uncaused, but, still, the causer, knew beforehand – engaging an infallible knowledge, not a probable one – that agent *A*, who, if it were placed in circumstance *C*, would freely perform action *a*, then *A* is not free, just for the reason that the knowledge of God is infallible and comprehensive, and if *A* is free, then divine knowledge could not be infallible, but only probable, because it only creates counterfactual circumstances *C*. A detailed critical analysis of a similar objection belongs to Robert Merrihew Adams who values the theoretical difference between infallible and probable knowledge.¹³⁷

On the other hand, one must emphasize that the theory of middle knowledge, as it is articulated by Craig and Alvin Plantinga, is established on the principle that God’s thinking is lineary or inferential, thus, conclusion *C* is extracted from *P1* (major premise) by means of *P2* (minor premise). More concretely, Craig reproduces Plantinga’s explanation claiming that “God is said to weakly actualize a state of affairs *S* if and only if He strongly actualizes a state of affairs *S** that counterfactually implies *S* (that is, were *S** to obtain, then *S* would

¹³⁵ Craig, “‘Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration”.

¹³⁶ Craig, “‘Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration”.

¹³⁷ Robert Merrihew Adams. “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1977): 109-17. Accessed January 24, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20009657>.

obtain).”¹³⁸ The emphasis that we would like to highlight as such is that, if God’s “middle knowledge” anticipates that *S* follows (being counterfactually implied) *S**, in the sense that between *S* and *S** there is a continuity (understanding that between social – physical – chemical circumstances and human free will there is a deep continuity that God knows beforehand), then the succession of *S* related to *S** is necessary, subsequently, knowledge of God is necessary, so it complies with the laws of inferential, lineary logic. Therefore, even God’s “weak actualisation”¹³⁹ entails an essential and known internal conditioning, it is still an actualisation. If there is no continuity between *S* and *S**, meaning that there are no intimate necessary causes which may somehow engender the actions of the free will, then we encounter two issues: 1. The human will acts at random and cannot fully explain its option. Consequently, it cannot be blamed or held responsible. 2, The actions of the free will, being mysteriously disconnected from the state of affairs *S*, do not possess a necessary relationship with them. Therefore, the knowledge of God is not a necessary knowledge, based on the lineary, inferential logic. God knowing, according to other logical bases, the succession of *S* related to *S**, which makes Craig’s and Plantinga’s analysis of God’s middle knowledge lose its competence, as, on the basis of inferential logic, a non-inferential thinking is analysed.

Craig, though, is convinced that the middle-knowledge theory can be successfully applied to the doctrine of inerrancy saying that “God knew, for example, that were He to create the Apostle Paul in just the circumstances he was in around AD 55, he would freely write to the Corinthian church, saying just what he did in fact say. It needs to be emphasized that those circumstances included not only Paul’s background, personality, environment, and so forth, but also any promptings or gifts of the Holy Spirit to which God knew Paul would freely respond.”¹⁴⁰ Craig concludes, “By weakly actualizing the composition of the books of the Bible, God can bring it about that biblical inspiration is in the fullest sense confluent.”¹⁴¹ Consequently, the Scriptures are a series of confluent compositions, with an intentional and direct, divine and human participation.

Following the diverse viewpoints about the Sacred Scriptures, the innerancy perspective of the Chicago Statement, the fallibilism of the Bible as human literature, Scripture’s incarnation, the incomprehensibility of the Scriptures,

¹³⁸ Craig, “‘Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration”.

¹³⁹ Craig, “ ‘Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration”.

¹⁴⁰ Craig, “‘Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration”.

¹⁴¹ Craig, “‘Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration”.

Scripture as a World of Contradictions, Scriptures as pieces of literature pertaining to their worlds, total inerrancy, the inerrancy of the Cross, a highly credible literature, and a confluent literature, we can easily ascertain that the Bible purely and simply resists interpretation to a certain degree. How could a postmodern man interpret such an opposition of the Bible to interpretation? Why did God not reveal the Scriptures in a clear, divine, unique and unparalleled way in order for us to believe? Why did God not nail down His revelation on some stone tablets as king Hammurabi did, in order to avoid the doubts regarding the original? Why did God not give us Scriptures deprived of the difficulty of interpretation in order to help us escape from the confusion of choice? These are only some of the questions that one could ask.

In conclusion, I will try to evoke a possible answer, drawn from the Biblical content itself, to the matter of the Bible's resistance to interpretation. First and foremost, I would like to point out that the American logician, Charles S. Peirce, considered that the removal of the vague or unclear nature of a physical or literary reality can be carried out naturally and initially by appealing to abductive reasoning, which brings to the foreground the most adequate conjecture for the explanation of a vagueness. Abductive reasoning is formulated by Peirce as follows:

The surprising fact, C, is observed;
But if A were true, C would be a matter of course,
Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true.¹⁴²

Vagueness, the logician believes, is a sign which, in "leaving its interpretation more or less indeterminate, reserves for some other possible sign or experience the function of completing the determination."¹⁴³ For instance, "This month," says the almanac-oracle, "a great event is to happen." "What event?" "Oh, we shall see. The almanac doesn't tell that."¹⁴⁴ And in order to make things even clearer, underlines that "The *vague* might be defined as that to which the principle of contradiction does not apply."¹⁴⁵ As a consequence, a text or a relation between texts, which is not the object of the principle of contradiction,

¹⁴² Deely, John, ed.: *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Electronic Edition, 1 June 1994, reproducing vols. I-VI, Hartshorne, Charles and Weiss, Paul eds.: Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1931-1935. vols. VII-VIII, Burks, Arthur W. ed.: (same publisher). 1958. Editorial introduction to electronic edition, CP 5.189.

¹⁴³ Deely, John, ed.: *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Electronic Edition, 1 June 1994, reproducing vols. I-VI, Hartshorne, Charles and Weiss, Paul eds.: Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1931-1935. vols. VII-VIII, Burks, Arthur W. ed.: (same publisher). 1958. Editorial introduction to electronic edition, CP 5.505.

¹⁴⁴ Idem.

¹⁴⁵ Idem.

means that the text or the relation between texts is not one which is characterized by contradiction, but by vagueness, whose lack of clarity can be accomplished through the contribution of data which, by their explanatory quality, may be proved as being the best option.

By adopting this principle, I will tackle the association of God's command concerning the judgment upon the nations in Numbers 25:17, 31:1-18 and Deuteronomy 20:10-20, with the golden rule mentioned by Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:44-48, namely, God's command "Harass the Midianites and strike them down, for they have harassed you"¹⁴⁶ and that of Jesus Christ "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ..."¹⁴⁷

Therefore, "the surprising fact" lies in the discrepancy between the command "kill them for they are your enemies" and the one that requires loving their very enemies. If God revealed the two texts, then how is it possible that He commanded the sentence of His judgement in a part of the sacred text, whereas in the second part of the same canon, He demanded love?

One of the hypotheses which may be advanced, and that we endorse here, is that God envisaged expressly the promotion and intact preservation of the trust in the only God, for the entire land of Canaan. It is good to know that for this objective there are, theoretically, not only internal causes of carrying it out, such as the appropriation of God's law as an ethical-cosmological paradigm (Jeremiah 31:33), but also external leverages, such as the removal of any external influential factors that are adverse, (see Shema Israel in Deuteronomy 6).

From the information that we have today, the people of Israel, to whom God addressed both of the commands, fought for survival in a time when alternative foreign practices were approached with disgust and hostility. Willie Thompson, reviewing the engaging of violence in coercive labour and slavery, wage contracts, economic and monetary activities, and up to popular protests and activities of institutionalised violence, since the palaeolithic and until modernity¹⁴⁸, explains that "[p]rior to the emergence of centralised states, settled social life was ruled by custom, and violence was intrinsic to it. Customary rules prescribed severe penalties including mutilation and death for – even accidental – violation of social custom or taboo [...] Violence was second nature to god-

¹⁴⁶ ESV Text Edition® (2016), *Bible Hub*, The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®) copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

¹⁴⁷ ESV Text Edition® (2016).

¹⁴⁸ Willie Thompson, "Exploitation and Violence," In *Work, Sex and Power: The Forces That Shaped Our History*, 78-98. London: Pluto Press, 2015, Accessed January 29, 2021.

kings in their domestic society, and therefore to organise, expand and extend it beyond their territory must have come very naturally.”¹⁴⁹

The Jews were the people of their time. Under this aspect, we may think about the hypothesis that God aimed, in fact, to judge and convert the violent and degraded life of the Canaanites. The Canaanites’ spiritual decay, by sinking deeper and deeper into polytheism, which is known to have adopted the most grotesque forms, from idol worship to child sacrifice, was dramatically toxic and contagious. The Jewish people were risking, by settling down in Canaan the loss of their religious identity and along with it the pure faith in the only true God. There was no sign of conversion on behalf of the Canaanite peoples to the universal faith in the only One God in the chronicles of the Old Testament. Nothing at that time could generate such a conversion, therefore, the only solution left was to warn and correct the ungodliness of the Canaanites was absolute judgment from God. In terms of the penalty that comes from God’s judgment, one might notice that it is not selective, namely it does not protect preferentially a people to the detriment of another. One knows that the failure of the people of Israel, when first attempting to conquer Ai, was the outcome of God’s intervention who had used the pagan people of this city to apply His Divine judgment upon Israel, due to their disobedience.

Therefore, in Numbers 25 and Deuteronomy 20, there is evoked the non-preferential judgment of God who employs, this time, the Jewish people in order to judge and convert, when the situation required it, the Canaanite peoples. One knows, both from the chronicles of the Old Testament – Joshua, 1, 2 Samuel, 1, 2 Kings, 1, 2 Chronicles, and from the prophetic writings like Isaiah and Jeremiah or Joel and Amos, that the Jewish people were either the object of the divine judgment, or the means of applying God’s justice or His exceptional forgiveness. God’s use of the Jewish people to apply His justice upon the Jews by means of other peoples had, among others, the role to create in the collective mindset of Israel and in the mind of each and every individual, the habit of a moral discernment. This was going to be fulfilled and implemented in the New Testament, in Jesus Christ, as well as in the community of love, which is the church, since discernment implies the love of truth, and the love of the neighbour necessarily claims discerning carefully between what is good for them and what is evil. Certainly, the idealist expectations of the postmodern reader for such texts formulate the pretence of having seen God operate patiently and non-violently under these circumstances. These expectations do not remain unfulfilled, but as long as we let ourselves be informed by the literature of the New Testament, about the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who, being God incarnate, managed to convert man from maliciousness and cruelty to God, and the kindness which results from a personal and transforming relationship with

¹⁴⁹ Thompson, “Exploitation and Violence,” 97.

God. Thus, what could not be carried out in the Old Testament through the Jews, concerning the Canaanites, was accomplished in the New Testament through Jesus, concerning the world.

As concerns the conversion through Jesus Christ, one knows from the books of the New Testament, for instance from Acts where Paul's presence and sermon in the Areopagus of Athens are narrated (Acts 17:15-34), that some people prefer to give up on the liberty of living indifferently in exchange for the happiness to live absorbing, by faith, God's love, manifested in Christ's sacrifice, whereas others prefer giving up on the happiness which arises from receiving God's love, in exchange for the freedom of living according to their will. The effect of this last option is the preservation of sin and evil actions. That is why there is no other solution, but, again, to apply God's judgment, about which Paul stated that it is already "set", and the judgment will be carried out through the same Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. He is ready to reveal and judge, accordingly, man's self-centred life who claims freedom in exchange for total dependence on God, although, man, is actually dependent on Him as the source of life.

The final judgment that Christ will accomplish, will accuse the very rejection of God's love by man, and will indicate the harmful consequences which issue implacably and irretrievably from the former's action. The texts in Numbers and Deuteronomy, thus, evoke, by and large, the seriousness of man's estrangement from God, whereas in the backstage of heaven there had already been prepared the divine plan of man's conversion, through love, by Christ.

There are a number of texts in the Bible of a similar complexity. However, why does God, whose character is perfect and infallible, acknowledge that His action in history and, especially, His action of revealing the truth about Himself, may adopt some imprecise phrases, specific to human languages, that are marked by vagueness and blur? Why was God's revelation through the Scriptures not made in a clearer way, without difficulties and retouches? Why does the Bible have an obvious resistance to interpretation? Why were we not given a Bible with an unbreached syntax, clad in a language lacking approximations, a content with an unequalled semantic, and sometimes enveloped in unpretentious stylistics?

To answer these questions, I would suggest an analogy (as a hypothesis) with the image of the Word's incarnation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, as a sign of divine love towards mankind.

John, the evangelist, has expressed the idea that the act of the incarnation of the Word is the outcome of God's love, in John 1:14, a verse which has a common context with the verse in 3:16. This body of Christ, though, needs water (John 4:7, 19:28), food (John 12:2). Consequently, it is a body subject to human needs and limitations.

On the other hand, Jesus's biographers do not talk about the features of His physical appearance, in the manner that others e.g., Joseph (Gen. 39:6), Saul (1 Samuel 9:2), David (1 Samuel 16:18) or Absalom (2 Samuel 14:25) are presented.

Nevertheless, God decided to reveal Himself through a finite body that lacked celestial qualities and angelic effects, just because He wanted to be like us, and to present Himself to us just as we present to each other, without any formal perfection or physical glow. Unlike, the doctrine of the Gnostics and Marcion, or the teaching of the Platonists, for whom the body is contemptable,¹⁵⁰ the Christology of John and Paul makes obvious the fact that through incarnation God became flesh, taking upon Himself a limited human body as ours.

Likewise, the morphology and syntax of the books in the New Testament are characterized, here and there, by irregularities or solecisms, as is the case of the book of Revelation. These, in spite of the fact that they can be explained to a great extent (the author's Semitical thinking, a Greek with strong Semitic accent or "idiolectal peculiarity"¹⁵¹), denote the finite side of the revelation.

God commanded that the Word's incarnation as well as Its revelation will put on the modest forms of expression, fully mirroring the limited and approximate human faculties of expression.

The divine word, consequently, does not perplex the reader through the elevation of a style or syntax and does not intend to dominate the reader through some ostentatious or impeccable, unprecedented and inimitable phrasing and rhetoric. The divine word speaks through human morphological and syntactical approximations so that man can access through it the meaning of Godly truth. God's descending in body is not only a topological, spatiotemporal accomplishment, but an ethical success of the Word; the latter descended up to the modest, but pragmatically sufficient expression of the approximate human language. In fact, even in the most abstract language, the mathematical one, we were not able, for instance, to perfectly include a square within a circle, and the numeric value of "pi" has never been completed, always being an approximation.¹⁵² We were born in a world limited by approximations, we got used to parts of the whole, "we think in part" and we express partly. And if God had chosen to speak to us in the highest form of the highest language

¹⁵⁰ Charles Lock, "Carnival and Incarnation: Bakhtin and Orthodox Theology," *Literature and Theology* 5, no. 1 (1991): 68-82, p. 71, accessed March 30, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23926648>.

¹⁵¹ Allen Dwight Callahan "The Language of Apocalypse." *The Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 4 (1995): 453-70. Accessed February 1, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1509837>.

¹⁵² See, Alfred S. Posamentier & Ingmar Lehmann, *a Biography of the World's Most Mysterious Number* (New York, Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004).

characterized by accuracy and objectivity, not even the most endowed intelligent minds could have deciphered it, because, as Alfred S. Penrose specifies, there are things that we possess, and others which surpass even the language of the most precise measurements: "[m]athematics itself indeed seems to have a robustness that goes far beyond what any individual mathematician is capable of perceiving."¹⁵³ And if God decided not to talk to us by means of the precision of the most accurate heavenly language, it means that He did us the favour of having talked to us the way a parent talks to the child they love.

It seems that in the texts in Matthew 13:10-17, Mark 4:11-12, Luke 8:10 and John 12:37-40, Jesus of Nazareth was aiming to awaken the audience from the comfort of ignorance which causes sterile complacency, and to arouse the uneasiness of ignorance, a condition which, through the concern which assists it, will challenge the thirst of the hearer to seek and acquire the truth which vivifies and transforms.

Therefore, the resistance of the Scriptures to interpretation can be interpreted as a deliberate means of the divine author to arouse the discomfort of ignorance and to establish the habit of discovering the meaning. Revelation, as it is, limited both in form and expression, is not only the novel expression of divine-human confluence, but also the urge which engages human-divine receptivity in the interpretive act, when, through a hermeneutics of hope and love, the fallible man and Holy Spirit actively co-participate at unravelling the Scriptures.

The feature of this prolific hermeneutical co-participation is an expression of a deep mutual love, both divine and human, characteristic of the glorious moment of a wedding ceremony.

Finally, one can note what is written in Hebrews 4:15 of the human Jesus. The fact is that while fully human he was without sin. Although humanness, as we know it (since the fall), is inherently sinful, it does not follow that sin is intrinsic or essential to humanness. In using this analogy this article can maintain that as the fully human Jesus was without sin, so in the fulness of the Word's humanity in the original autographs it can also be without error, i.e., inerrant.

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¹⁵³ Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality, A Complete Guide To The Laws of The Universe* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004), 13.

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