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Evangelical doctrines of Scripture in transatlantic perspective

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Evangelicals are a people marked by a commitment to the Bible.[1] In contemporary self-presentation, this is often the single defining feature that is invoked to define what it is to be 'Evangelical';[2] in the standard British scholarly account of the nature of Evangelicalism, it is one pole only of David Bebbington's quadrilateral, alongside crucicentrism, conversionism and activism, but it is still a decisive defining characteristic;[3] George Marsden, writing from the other side of the Atlantic, also lists 'the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture' as one of five defining Evangelical convictions.[4] These two historians are not attempting to prescribe what people who wish to be called Evangelical should believe, but to describe what people who have been called Evangelical have in fact believed – and the Bible is central to both accounts.

In the United States of America, and to a lesser extent in Canada, the precise nature of this commitment to the Bible is also spelt out. Evangelicals are people who own the Bible to be 'inerrant'. Members of the Evangelical Theological Soci-

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1 This essay is the script for the 2008 Laing Lecture, delivered at London School of Theology February 2008. I would like to record my immense gratitude to the Principal and Faculty of LST for the invitation to deliver the lecture, and for their hospitality whilst I was there.

2 Most thoughtful Evangelicals see it as only one defining feature of the movement (see, e.g., Nigel Wright, *The Radical Evangelical: Seeking a Place to Stand* (London: SPCK, 1996), which takes Bebbington's quadrilateral as its basic definition (3-5), or John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity and Faithfulness* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 26-34, which adapts Bebbington and Packer into a six-pronged definition of Stott's own. See also David Hilborn's brief paper, written for and owned by the Evangelical Alliance, 'What is an Evangelical?' (http://www.eauk.org/about/what_is.cfm), which adapts Bebbington and McGrath to a five-pointed definition). However, in popular presentation 'Evangelicals as Bible Christians' is a common enough summary. See Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 4: '…the majority of evangelicals are conscious of their shared identity which they express often in terms of their submission to the authority of scripture.'

3 David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3-19.

4 George M. Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), ix-x.

ety are required to re-subscribe annually to a statement of faith which contains only two clauses: the inerrancy of the (original autographs of) the Scriptures, and the triunity of God.[5] For most American Evangelicals, to question the inerrancy of Scripture is, rather simply and directly, to place oneself outwith the Evangelical tradition.[6] There have been attempts to spell out the implications of this claim of inerrancy, notably in the three 'Chicago Statements',[7] which have perhaps attracted less than total agreement, but the basic point remains: the Evangelical confession concerning the Scriptures in America is that the Scriptures are inerrant. I observe, however, that the language of 'inerrancy' is almost wholly absent from the confessional documents of British Evangelicalism over the same period – there is one exception, which I shall indicate in a moment. It seems to me surprising that so central a claim on one side of the Atlantic should be virtually unknown, or if known unaccepted, on the other.[8] This lecture is an attempt to explore this surprising observation, giving historical reasons as to why it might have come about, suggesting that it is helpful in understanding the origins of other differences between British and North American Evangelical traditions, and exploring some of the theological consequences of the difference.

Inerrancy and American Evangelicalism

Let me begin, then, by exploring the rise and nature of confessions of inerrancy in American Evangelicalism. It should be noticed that this widespread commit-

5 The entire doctrinal basis of the ETS reads: 'The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.' (from the society website http://www.etsjets.org/?q=about; last accessed 1/2/08).

6 Consider the claim of K. R. Trembath: '"Biblical inerrancy" has become such a part of the identity of fundamentalism and some strands of evangelicalism that most American Christians do not know what either stands for apart from it… this constriction of the significance of evangelicalism to one particular doctrine within it results as much from those who stand within this branch of the church as from those outside it.' *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration: A Review and a Proposal* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), 96-97. An Evangelical institution such as Fuller Theological Seminary, which does not presently employ the word 'inerrant' in its Statement of Faith, publishes a full and defensive account of why this is so in a prominent position on its website. See: http://www.fuller.edu/provost/aboutfuller/believe_teach.asp, a page linked from the main 'About Fuller' page (last accessed on 5/2/08).

7 The most significant was the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy of 1978 (hereafter CSBI); it was followed by the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics in 1982 (hereafter CSBH) and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Application in 1986 (hereafter CSBA).

8 Whilst I restrict my survey to confessional documents, David Bebbington suggests that the point holds even for individual writers: '[a]n examination of the chief statements about scripture by Evangelicals in the first half of the twentieth century has revealed a remarkable absence of assertions about inerrancy.' *Evangelicalism*, 189, citing David F. Wright, 'Soundings in the Doctrine of Scripture in British Evangelicalism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', *Tyndale Bulletin*, 31 (1980), 100ff.

ment to inerrancy is a fairly recent development: the 'Evangelical' coalition that defined itself in opposition to fundamentalism in the 1940s did not, in its origins, assert 'inerrancy'; both the National Association of Evangelicals and Youth for Christ,[9] to take two of the key organisations arising in the 1940s, confess the Bible to be 'the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.'[10] Marsden regards the conservative emphasis on inerrancy as one of the issues that split the Evangelical coalition, highlighting Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* (1976) as the book which succeeded in bringing the question into broad public consciousness as a primary issue.[11] The fact that the 'International Council on Biblical Inerrancy,' the body which produced the Chicago statements, came together only two years after Lindsell's book is surely significant.[12]

(The earlier 'World's Christian Fundamentals Association' formed in 1919 after the publication of *The Fundamentals* did demand subscription to inerrancy; as McGowan notes, however, at least one of the contributors to *The Fundamentals*, James Orr, was broadly opposed to the doctrine.[13] Whilst Fundamentalism

9 For some of the history, and the centrality of these two groups, see, e.g., Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 141-76.

10 The two organisations use identical 'Statements of Faith'; See http://www.yfc.net/Brix?pageID=12791 and http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=nae.statement_of_faith (last accessed on 5/2/08).

11 George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 75-76; see also the list of works on the issue from this time in Mark A. Noll, 'Evangelicals and the Study of the Bible' in Marsden (ed.), *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, 98-99.

12 Andrew McGowan, in his helpful survey of the development of inerrancy, suggests that Chicago was a defensive reaction to Rogers and McKim. This seems to me untenable, not least because Rogers and McKim did not publish their decisive book until after the first Chicago Statement. McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives* (Leicester: Apollos, 2007), 103; see Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1979). It is true that Rogers had made some of his points a decade earlier (see Rogers, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession: A Problem of Historical Interpretation for American Presbyterianism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969]), but this, narrower, book caused nothing like the stir his joint work with McKim caused, presumably because the inerrancy debate amongst Evangelicals had not to that point been ignited.

13 McGowan, *Divine Spiration*, 135, with lengthy quotations from Orr; McGowan highlights Orr's contribution to *The Fundamentals* on 89, describing Orr as one 'who was unhappy with any doctrine of inerrancy.' George Marsden suggests that '…on the inerrancy of Scripture… the editors chose authors only from their own camp to write specifically on the doctrine of Scripture… a number of the authors on other topics were known to be soft on inerrancy.' George Marsden, ed., *The Fundamentals* (New York: Garland, 1988: 4 vols) vol. I, 11-12. Marsden highlights Orr, alongside G. Campbell-Morgan, in this connection. Both Orr and Campbell Morgan were in the very first volume, Orr on 'The Virgin Birth of Christ' and Campbell Morgan on 'The Purpose of the Incarnation'. In total, Orr contributed four essays, including 'The Early Narratives of Genesis' in vol. VI and 'Holy Scripture and Modern Negations' in vol. IV. The former essay is remarkable in its broad acceptance of critical scholarship, and its

as a settled movement was committed to inerrancy, this history makes it clear that there is not even an easy line of descent from Hodge and Warfield's articulation of the position, on which see below, to its widespread adoption by conservative believers.)

The success of the campaign waged by Lindsell, the ICBI, and others, is evident in current American Evangelicalism. Major Evangelical organisations have re-written their statements of faith to affirm inerrancy, and groups and individuals who deny, or even simply do not explicitly affirm, inerrancy are either excluded from the Evangelical fold, or at best find themselves defensive and in danger of being marginalised within it.[14]

Inerrancy at its most basic is merely the confession that the Bible is without factual error in those things it affirms. Thus stated, there seems little doubt that it has been a generally-held position within the Christian churches down the ages.[15] It is not very difficult to find explicit affirmations that the Bible makes no errors from across the history of the church; even where no explicit affirmation can be found, however, there seems good reason to suppose that, if asked the question, the vast majority of Christian denominations and theologians prior to the rise of higher criticism would have affirmed inerrancy,[16] as would conservatives of every stripe, not just Evangelical, more recently.[17]

The claim that Warfield invented the doctrine of inerrancy is one often heard; the forgoing might seem to deny it, but we must be careful what we mean by 'the doctrine of inerrancy'. Warfield, initially with A.A. Hodge,[18] and then alone,[19]

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attempt to defuse 'creationist' readings of Genesis; the latter repeatedly describes the Scriptures as 'an infallible guide'.

14 On which see again the Fuller statement above.

15 So e.g. the German Jesuit Norbert Lohfink: 'this [the inerrancy of the Bible] is an ancient and unequivocal confession of faith' *The Inerrancy of Scripture and Other Essays* (E.T. of *Das Siegeslied am Schilfmeer*, 1965) (Berkeley: Bibal, 1991), 24.

16 Amongst the Fathers, perhaps only Jerome and Origen can be charged with admitting errors in Scripture; no others. Jerome speaks three times of *scriptoris errorem* (Ep. 77:5; Ep. 57:7; *In Mich.* 5:2; see Migne, *PL*, 22:676; 22:573; 25:1197 respectively). Origen famously doubts the historicity of various events and details; for a full and sober review of the evidence, see R.P.C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 259-88.

17 I believe that the first formal ecclesial affirmation of inerrancy is in Vatican I, in 1870, where we are told of the scriptures that *revelationem sine errore contineant (Const. Dog. de Fide Cath.* cap. 2). See also a fascinating little tract representing a group of conservative Anglo-Catholics, and entitled *The Inspiration and Inerrancy of the Bible* (P. J. Thompson & H. E. Symonds, *Towards Catholic Unity II* [London: SPCK, 1939]).

18 See A.A. Hodge & B.B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (ed. Roger R. Nicole) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), a reprint of a *Presbyterian Review* article of 1881; the article nowhere uses the term 'inerrant' (or 'inerrancy'), preferring 'without error,' but in it the key doctrinal development is in place.

19 Warfield's comments on inerrancy are helpfully gathered in a volume of his collected works: B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1948).

crafted a doctrine of Scripture in which inerrancy was the primary affirmation. It was not just that Scripture was, amongst other things, inerrant; the first and most significant thing to be said about the Bible was that it was inerrant. (It might be fairer to say that the first thing to be said was plenary verbal inspiration, and that the first and most significant consequence of that was inerrancy; inerrancy becomes for Warfield at least the primary *attribute* of the Bible.) As Noll has pointed out, this position is in some ways merely reactionary: the Princeton doctrine of Scripture did not much change from Archibald Alexander's inaugural in 1812 to J. Gresham Machen's strictures against Fosdick in 1924; but Alexander had been affirming broadly-held orthodoxy; Machen's position was so conservative as to be remarkable.[20] This conservatism was conscious and celebrated: fifty years into his professorship, Charles Hodge apparently rejoiced that 'a new idea never originated in this seminary'.[21]

In this reactionary defence of old orthodoxy, however, inevitably certain themes, relatively minor in the earlier position, assume a new importance. Princeton's Old Testament scholars devoted themselves between 1850 and 1930 to defending the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch; her theologians gave themselves to inerrancy. Alexander would have assumed both positions, but emphasised neither. Warfield's great legacy was the elevation of plenary verbal inspiration resulting in inerrancy to the primary position in the doctrine of Scripture. It is this decision that has been broadly accepted by North American Evangelicalism in recent years, as evidenced by the various symbolic statements, such as that of ETS, which confess only the inerrancy of Scripture.

It is this which is, I think, new in theological history. In the various defences of the antiquity of inerrancy that have appeared since the Chicago statements, it is striking how rarely anyone in church history has been found simply affirming that the Bible is without error. It is a position routinely implied, and almost always, I am sure, assumed, but almost never stated. Take a representative volume *Inerrancy and the Church*, edited by John D. Hannah,[22] which carries the imprint of the ICBI. The editor writes on the patristic period, but is unable to cite *one single quotation* that affirms inerrancy in terms! Many Fathers affirm the trustworthiness, or the authority, or the majesty, of the Scriptures, and their views on inerrancy may be inferred from such affirmations; still others affirm the lack of internal contradictions, but logically speaking this is still not a doctrine of inerrancy – merely a claim that whatever errors may be contained in the Scriptures are consistently held. Wayne R. Spear fares slightly better on 'Augustine's Doctrine of Biblical Infallibility,' finding precisely two clear affirmations that the Bible is without error, both in letters to Jerome (Ep. 28 & 82) – it may be that he was aware of Jerome's admission of errors in Scripture and was seeking

20 See Mark A. Noll (ed.) *The Princeton Defense of Plenary Verbal Inspiration* (New York: Garland, 1988), iv for Noll's comments, and 233-48 for Machen's review of Fosdick.
21 Noll, *Princeton Defense*, vi, quoting A.A. Hodge's biography of his father.
22 Chicago: Moody, 1984.

to correct him. The best John F. Johnson can do on scholasticism is to affirm that St Thomas believed that the Bible came directly from God, which is true, and then to fill in the standard inerrantist argument that it thus cannot contain error. Again, I do not doubt that Thomas believed this; he might even have said so somewhere; but it is striking that authors on a mission to demonstrate that this has been the settled position of the church can between them find no more than two passing comments in letters of Augustine prior to the Reformation.

If Warfield brings inerrancy to centre-stage in American evangelicalism, it is Chicago that demands for it a starring role. The three Chicago statements spell out at some length the specific claims and implications of belief in inerrancy; I do not have space to survey everything that is said here,[23] so let me highlight two points only:

1. The Chicago statements makes inerrancy not just truth, but dogma; to fail to believe in Biblical inerrancy is to embrace a grave error which, we are told, will have consequences.[24]
2. The Chicago statements make a series of philosophical and hermeneutic claims about the nature of truth, and about the relationship between Biblical text and truth;[25] thus an affirmation of inerrancy becomes not just a formal affirmation of the authority of Scripture properly interpreted, but a material affirmation of a series of particular positions, including (by the time the three statements are complete): six-day creationism;[26] gender complementarity in marriage;[27] proper practices of Bible translation;[28] just war theory;[29] and so on.

As I have already indicated, adherence to all these positions is rather disputed within American Evangelicalism; it may be that the ICBI over-reached itself with the second, and particularly the third, statements. There does not, however, appear to be an extensive literature discussing the implications of inerrancy, and it appears to me that some, at least, of the Chicago positions (gender complementarity, for instance) have become more significant in American Evangelicalism in recent years, so perhaps the statement created a certain pressure towards

23 For an excellent account of the rise, implications, and problems of modern inerrancy, see Jeffrey S. Oldfield, *The Word Became Text and Dwelt Among Us* (PhD Thesis, St Andrews University, 2007).

24 See CSBI 'short statement' 5: 'The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded… such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.'; also CSBH Art. 1: '…the normative authority of Holy Scripture is the authority of God Himself…'.

25 See especially CSBH Art. VI: '…the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute. We further affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts.'

26 CSBH Art. XXII.

27 CSBA Art. VII.

28 CSBH Art. XII.

29 CSBA Art. XI.

such positions by attempting to seize the definition of the mutually-agreed term 'inerrancy'.

My claim thus far has been threefold: I have accepted that the vast majority of Christian theologians through the ages assumed the inerrancy of the Bible; I have also suggested that they did not regard this as an important enough topic to mention it, almost ever. Finally, I have indicated that, by various routes, this confession of inerrancy has become standard in North American Evangelicalism. Let me now turn to the other side of the Atlantic.

British Evangelical accounts of Scripture

Rob Warner has recently surveyed English pan-Evangelical doctrinal formularies, looking in particular at the doctrine of Scripture.[30] He analyses them using a single-axis typology, classifying accounts as more or less 'right' or 'left'.[31] In this, he mirrors a fairly standard assumption about Evangelicalism: there is a spectrum within the movement, ranging from conservatives to radicals, and belief about the Bible (along with the atonement, the doctrines of grace, and charismatic renewal) provide a convincing touch-point whereby the position along this axis of a thinker or organisation may be determined. I want to argue that this analysis is wrong at almost every point, but let me start with the data.

The doctrinal basis agreed in 1846 by the nascent Evangelical Alliance affirmed succinctly 'The divine inspiration, authority and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures,' a phrasing that was repeated in the concise 1912 basis of membership.[32] This starting-point already demonstrates a puzzling (to me, at least) yet recurrent feature of Evangelical affirmations concerning Scripture: they repeatedly employ words that are meaningless without further specification, in this case 'sufficiency': sufficient for what? One may claim that the Bible is sufficient for saving faith, or that Genesis 2 is sufficient to construct a historical account of human origins, or even that 1 Chronicles 1-9 is sufficient for a prosopography of pre-exilic Israel, and each statement can be argued to be right or wrong, but to claim that the Bible is merely 'sufficient' is, as far as I can see, neither right nor wrong but simply meaningless.[33] The same problem occurs with another favourite Evangelical word, 'infallible': to assert that the Bible will not fail demands an answer to the question 'to do what?' before the assertion can have any truth-

30 Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism 1966-2001: A Theological and Sociological Study* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 150-73 & 223-25.

31 This simplistic analytical tool runs through the latter half of Warner's book, and his entire analysis of recent English Evangelicalism is conducted in these terms, despite it becoming increasingly obvious that the data he presents resists such easy classification.

32 See Warner, 224-25 for the texts, and 157 for a brief account of the status of the 1912 statement.

33 In context, of course, it was a rejection of 'Romanist' claims that anything beyond Scripture was necessary for faith or doctrine. It failed, however, to actually say this.

value at all.[34]

The first major revision of the 1846 Evangelical Alliance basis was undertaken in 1970. The affirmation concerning Scripture was amended to read: 'The divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture and its consequent entire trustworthiness and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.'[35] This has been revised again recently, in 2005, to read: '[t]he divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, which are the written Word of God – fully trustworthy for faith and conduct.'[36] Warner finally highlights another EA document, the 'Bournemouth Declaration' of the 'National Assembly of Evangelicals' in 1996. Here, the Scripture clause was placed within a Christological framework: '[w]e confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God's Word incarnate; supreme authority is his. We recognise Scripture as God's Word written, the definitive, normative and sufficient revelation of God's truth.'[37]

The British Evangelical Council, formed in 1953, and renamed Affinity in 2004, might be regarded as a more 'conservative' body than the Evangelical Alliance. In fact, it has worked with the EA on various projects over the years,[38] and is represented on various EA bodies, for instance the doctrinal committees ACUTE

34 I am aware of Packer's claim that 'infallibility' is a borrowing of the Latin *infallibilitas*, meaning 'the quality of neither deceiving nor being deceived' *God Has Spoken* (London: Hodder, 1978, 111), which is followed by Chicago (CSBI Art. XI), presumably on Packer's influence, but I am not sure whence this claim is derived. The word 'infallibility' in English never, according to the authority of the *OED*, carries the sense Packer ascribes to it, being used of the Scriptures in the seventeenth century, but with the more natural meaning. The Lt *infallibilitas* is a relatively late coinage, used first, apparently, by Augustine in reference to the certainty of predestination; in medieval usage it carries the same meaning of 'inevitability'. In ecclesial usage, it remains fairly rare until the late nineteenth-century debates over the authority of the pope: no Reformed or Lutheran symbol proclaims the Scriptures to be *infallibilis* (except the Latin of Westminster, where it is a translation of 'infallibility'); amongst the Reformed scholastics, van Mastricht will speak of Scripture as a *regula infallibilis* (*Theoretico-Practica Theologia* I.2.iv, 19 and I.2.xiii, 24), and will use the word repeatedly in describing the actions of the Holy Spirit in inspiring Scripture. His extensive list of the attributes of Scripture, however, does not include 'infallibility'; preferring instead *auctoritas* and *veritas* (I.2.xiv-xv). Edward Leigh used the English word 'infallibility', according to Richard Muller, who cites *A Treatise of Divinity* (London: 1646) I.viii (131). Schmid's testimony suggests the term is not used by the Lutheran scholastics (see Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (tr. Hay & Jacobs) (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1899), §§6-12 & 51.) Whilst Latin *fallo* can mean 'to deceive', to derive an alternative meaning for an English word by presuming the sense of one part of a compound Latin root, without evidence that the compound was ever used in such a way in either Latin or English, seems hazardous.

35 Warner, 225.

36 Warner, 225.

37 Warner, 207-208.

38 For instance, sponsoring the Evangelical Leaders' Forum during the 1990s.

and now TAPPAC.[39] The self-identified major distinctive[40] of Affinity when compared to the EA is a suspicion of relationships with non-Evangelical churches; this became a major point of division in British Evangelicalism following John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones's public disagreement on the possibility of effective Evangelical influence in 'mixed' denominations at the National Assembly of Evangelicals in October 1966. Given the historic development of Evangelicalism within mixed denominations, this may be regarded as more nearly radical than conservative. Other distinctives are on more traditionally 'conservative' matters of Evangelical disagreement: a resistance to admitting women to ordained ministry, and to charismatic renewal, for instance. Affinity is the only significant British organisation that uses the word 'inerrancy,' affirming in its doctrinal basis: '[t]he inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures as originally given, their verbal inspiration by God and their supreme authority as the only rule of faith and practice.'[41]

The largest group of churches within Affinity is the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC). Its present 'Basis of Faith,' written in 1922,[42] and revised in 1991, has a fairly lengthy Scripture clause, which asserts:

> God has revealed himself in the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments alone. Every word was inspired by God through human authors, so that the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the Word of God, without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine. The Bible alone speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice.

This chooses not to use the word 'inerrancy', although includes the phrase 'without error,' which would seem to be a precise equivalent.

Alongside the EA, the other major body that can claim a broad and repre-

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39 ACUTE, the 'Alliance Commission for Unity and Truth amongst Evangelicals' was amalgamated with the Alliance's Public Policy Commission to form the Theology And Public Policy Advisory Committee in 2007. The present author is the current chair of TAPPAC.

40 The 'about' page of the Affinity website highlights this point in its first paragraph: 'For over 50 years, the BEC stood for robust evangelical orthodoxy, separate from the contaminating influences of false ecumenism. Affinity is building on this same, firm foundation…' http://www.affinity.org.uk/about/article/affinity/ (last accessed 2/2/08).

41 Is this a more 'conservative' statement than the various offerings of EA, UCCF, etc.? By the end of this lecture I shall have argued that 'inerrancy' is not a stronger or more conservative doctrine of Scripture than others, merely a differently-formulated one; bracketing that word, then, the formulation is very similar to those offered by EA over the years, stressing inspiration and 'supreme authority.' The BEC (as was) appears to have regarded inerrancy as important. Its silver jubilee year was marked by the publication of three addresses, under the title *The Bible under Attack*, written by Hywel Jones, Edgar Andrews and Iain Murray (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1978); Jones writes on 'The Inerrancy of Scripture' focusing on British reaction to Lindsell's *Battle for the Bible* (Andrews treats 'Creation and Evolution' and Murray 'Signs of the Times').

42 The FIEC came together in 1922 under the influence of E. J. Poole-Connor, at the time as an unnamed 'undenominational union'.

sentative status within British Evangelicalism is perhaps UCCF: The Christian Unions (formerly the 'Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship'; formally the 'Inter-Varsity Fellowship'). UCCF traces its history to the founding of the Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union in 1877, its split from the Student Christian Movement in 1910, and the subsequent organisation of the various university Christian Unions into a national body in 1928;[43] the doctrinal basis was written as a standard around which the 1928 union would take place; it affirmed '[t]he divine inspiration and infallibility of Holy Scripture, as originally given, and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.' The basis was revised in 1974, and again in 1981, but the Scripture clause remained unchanged. The Tyndale Fellowship, the major British Evangelical fellowship of scholars, subscribes to the UCCF basis of faith.

There are two other sources of significant Evangelical doctrinal statements: the smaller Evangelical denominations, and the Evangelical theological colleges. Amongst the former, the Evangelical Movement of Wales (EMW) and the Free Church of Scotland perhaps stand out as the most significant; the Free Church, in common with many Scottish Evangelical bodies, finds the historic Scots commitment to the Westminster Standards sufficient. The EMW places its account of the Scriptures in the preamble of its Statement of Beliefs, asserting: '[w]e believe the holy scriptures, as originally given, to be the infallible Word of God, of divine inspiration and therefore, we accept them as our sole authority in all matters of faith and practice.' My own denomination, the Baptist Union of Scotland, affirms its Evangelical identity; it follows traditional (British) Baptist practice of being very modest in its symbolic statements, and the clause of its Declaration of Principle that concerns Scripture runs as follows: 'That the Lord Jesus Christ our God and Saviour is the sole and absolute Authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.'

Amongst the colleges, in the present context I will give pride of place to the London School of Theology. The original doctrinal basis, written in 1942 by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Montague Goodman and Alan Stibbs, affirmed simply '[t]he divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Holy Scriptures'.[44] The present Doctrinal Basis, written in 1998 and adapted from a Scripture Union statement from Zimbabwe, affirms much more fully:

> We believe that the Old and New Testament Scriptures are God-breathed since their writers spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; hence, they are fully trustworthy in all that they affirm; and as the written Word of God they are our supreme authority for faith and conduct.

43 See Oliver Barclay, *Whatever Happened to the Jesus Lane Lot?* (Leicester: IVP, 1977) for a brief account of the history, factually accurate if rather slanted in presentation.

44 See Ian M. Randall, *Educating Evangelicalism: The Origins, Development and Impact of London Bible College* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 27.

> We acknowledge the need for the Scriptures to be rightly interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and using the gifts of understanding and scholarship that God has given to his people.

Amongst the other major non-denominational Evangelical colleges, the International Christian College in Glasgow and All Nations Christian College both affirm the UCCF Doctrinal Basis; Moorlands chooses not to publicise any statement of faith; Highland Theological College has no published basis, but again follows the Scottish practice of commitment to Westminster; the Evangelical denominational colleges (Spurgeons; Cliff; Trinity Bristol; Wycliffe Hall; Oak Hill; St John's Nottingham; Cranmer Hall; etc.) have no stated doctrinal positions beyond the denominational ones.

The data so far presented includes three versions of the EA Basis of Faith, and two other quasi-symbolic documents from the EA; doctrinal bases from Affinity, the FIEC and the EMW; a statement that has remained constant through the three revisions of the UCCF basis; and the two versions of the London School of Theology basis. These eight statements make a variety of claims about Scripture, which may be tabulated as follows:

Scripture is…	EA	Affinity	FIEC	EMW	UCCF	LST
Without error/ Inerrant		X	X			
Infallible				X	X	
Authoritative	1846, 1912, 1970, 2005	X	X	X	X	1942, 1998
Inspired	1846, 1912, 1970, 2005	X	X	X	X	1942, 1998[45]
Sufficient	1846, 1912, 1996		X			
Trustworthy	1970, 2005					1998
Word of God	1996, 2005		X	X		1998
Definitive	1996					
Normative	1996					
Reliable			X			

This suggests to me two things: first, the sheer variety of confession concerning the doctrine of Scripture in British Evangelicalism; and second the universality of two points: the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. (The only statement to avoid either of these terms is the 1996 Bournemouth Declaration, which seemed to consciously eschew any traditional language). It suggests to Warner a range of British positions on Scripture, none as conservative as Chicago. On his analysis, then, the reason American Evangelicals use 'inerrancy' whilst we do

45 'God-breathed'.

not is that they are more conservative than we are. Is the solution to my conundrum so simple?

The question reduces to another one, more amenable to investigation in a lecture such as this: can this data be made to fit a single-axis analysis such as Warner's? If so, then Chicago-inerrantists are just the conservative wing of the Evangelical movement. I think Warner's analysis at least needs clarification, however: first, the axis needs more careful specification than Warner gives it. He interchangeably uses words such as 'right-wing' and 'conservative' for one pole, and 'left-wing,' progressive,' and 'moderate' for the other. 'Right wing' seems to imply, for Warner, a commitment to Calvinistic orthodoxy, and a resistance to charismatic renewal, ecumenism, and the ordination of women; at the same time, in Warner's terms, it implies a commitment to a propositional account of doctrine and the pressing of a socially conservative ethical agenda on society. It is not clear to me that all these things are quite so commonly found together in strands of Evangelicalism; Pentecostal and charismatic new churches, for instance, are regularly particularly socially conservative and refuse ordination to women; they combine this with an openness to renewal and a fairly regular commitment to Arminianism. It seems obvious, further, that a 'conservative-progressive' axis is a rather different thing to a 'conservative-moderate' one; the former stressing conformity to a tradition; the latter strength of distinctives. A strong commitment to Calvinism is 'conservative' as opposed to 'moderate,' but is surely not 'conservative' as opposed to 'progressive' given the place of Arminianism in Evangelical beginnings.

I think, then, that Warner's terms must be set aside as unhelpful, but this does not of course mean that his analysis is without value. Let me quote at length his reasons for assigning different statements to different positions on his scale, because they strike me as revealing:

> Classifying approaches to biblical inspiration, we identify a clear gradation. Starting with the most conservative, the first statement [CSBI] asserts inerrancy, and states that grave consequences follow from rejecting this conviction… The second [Affinity] also affirms inerrancy, but without any dire warnings. Position three [UCCF] affirms infallibility. Position four [A statement from the 1967 Anglican Evangelical Keele conference] speaks only of supreme authority, but retains relatively right-wing status by… a polemical exclusivity in opposition to Christian mysticism, sacramentalism, existentialism and… resistance to the emerging experientialism of charismatic renewal. Position five [the Lausanne Covenant] uses the language of infallibility, but shifts the locus from the text to the Bible's function as a rule of faith and practice. Position six [EA 1970 & LST 1998] emphasises supreme authority without reference to infallibility. Position seven [An American statement from IVCF] avoids the word "supreme", preferring the term "unique". Position eight [EA 1846] affirms divine inspiration and authority with no additional adjectival reinforcers, neither negative (infallible, inerrant) nor positive (supreme, unique). Position nine [Bournemouth – EA 1996] affirms instead the supreme authority of Christ,

> describing Scripture as definitive, normative and sufficient revelation, but denoting its authority to be essentially secondary [sic, to] and derivative from the authority of the risen Christ.[46]

Warner appears to work with a basic axis where 'inerrant' is the most conservative claim, 'infallible' next, and 'authoritative' least conservative; within this, qualifiers such as 'supreme' push a position to the right, and subordination of the authority of Scripture to the authority of Christ pushes it to the left. Let me examine these three assumptions in reverse order.

Warner describes the 1996 Bournemouth Declaration as the 'least conservative' of any of the confessional statements on Scripture, on the basis of the explicitly Christological location of the doctrine. However, the location of a doctrine does not determine the force of it: any student of post-Reformation dogmatics knows that the locus on Scripture moved around endlessly, sometimes being placed in prolegomena in a discussion of the nature of theology;[47] sometimes it is located elsewhere, or in more than one place;[48] in perhaps the most extreme case, William Ames's *Marrow of Theology* chooses to locate the doctrine of Scripture on the eleventh level of subdivision down, under ecclesiology: the ministers of the church are divided in this Ramist scheme into the 'ordinary ministers' – pastors, elders and deacons – and 'extraordinary ministers' – the prophets and apostles whose vocation was to write the Scriptures.[49] Ames, a Puritan exile who was a leading figure at the Synod of Dort, did not have a weak or deficient doctrine of Scripture. In the case of the recent Evangelical confessions, there is routinely a relation of the authority of Scripture to the authority of God somewhere in the prefatory or explanatory material;[50] the statement Warner regards as the most conservative, CSBI, includes this, and the second Chicago statement, CSBH, aligns the doctrine of Scripture with Christology in ways that are not dissimilar to Bournemouth.[51] Further, the Baptist Union of Scotland has an even stronger relativisation of Scripture to the Person of Christ, but is hardly on the liberal wing of Evangelicalism. So if the Christological location is not enough to brand the statement 'left wing', what is left? The wording of the Bournemouth statement is hardly a weak account of Scripture, which is described as the 'definitive, normative and sufficient revelation of God's truth.'

When it comes to qualifiers of Warner's three basic terms, it seems to me that there is a need for careful distinction. Consider the most regularly-qualified term in the statements I have surveyed, 'authority'. EA-1846 confessed the Scriptures to have 'authority'; in twentieth-century symbols, this was routinely qualified

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46 Warner, 223-24.

47 So Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*.

48 Turrentin, *Inst. Theol. Elenc.*, has Scripture as his second locus, after 'Theology'; Calvin treats Scripture in several places throughout his *Institutes*.

49 See Ames, *Marrow of Theology* (tr. J. Dykstra Eusden) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 182-89; see G. Amesius, *Medulla S.S. Theologiae…* (ed. tert.) (London: Robertus Allottus, 1629) 172-85.

50 See CSBI 'Short Statement' 1; FIEC statement.

51 See CSBH Arts 1 -3.

to 'supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice,' or some very similar phrase.[52] 'Supreme authority' sounds, rhetorically, like it is a strengthening, but in fact its logical status is potentially weaker than a simple claim to 'authority,' in that it implies the existence of other, real but subordinate, authorities. If the Bible is 'the authority,' then no other appeal is permissible; if it is 'the supreme authority,' then I may believe in the real, albeit subordinate, authority of other documents – the ecumenical creeds, perhaps.[53]

The same may be said of the addition concerning 'faith and practice': the rhetorical effect is again strengthening, but the logical effect is to raise the possibility that there are matters not pertaining to 'faith and practice' (or 'faith and conduct') in which the Scriptures in fact have no authority – matters of science or history, perhaps. Such analysis makes the statements difficult to analyse, of course: did writers adding 'supreme' to 'authority' think they were strengthening, or grasp that they were weakening, the claim? What of those who agreed to accept the revised documents? Such questions are almost impossible to answer, but make Warner's left-right classifications very difficult to defend.

Finally, what of the basic scheme? Even if Warner has slightly over-reached himself in the fine gradations, does his basic assertion that 'inerrancy' is a stronger, more conservative, doctrine of Scripture than 'authority', with 'infallibility' somewhere between the two, stand up? I have to say that it is not clear to me that it does. Within American Evangelicalism, there might be an argument for viewing 'infallible' as weaker than 'inerrant', because it has become the term of choice for those who consciously want to admit errors in Scripture. However, the term was used with some cheerfulness by Hodge and Warfield in their classic 1881 essay, and the use of it in British confessions, pre-dating recent American controversies, would seem to look back to that usage. I am of the view that, prior to American controversies in the 1970s, 'inerrancy' and 'infallibility' were seen by all writers as synonymous terms;[54] Andrew McGowan, in his recent book on

52 So UCCF; EA-1970; LBC-1998; LBC-1942 has just 'supreme authority'; EA-2005 had 'supreme authority,' but appended the qualifier about 'faith and conduct' to the 'trustworthiness' rather than 'authority' of the Scriptures.

53 For an argument to this effect, see Ch. 10 of my *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003).

54 As the controversies began, see Lindsell: 'A word needs to be said about the use of the words *infallible* and *inerrant*. There are some who try to distinguish between these words as though there is a difference. I do not know of any standard dictionary that does not use these two words interchangeably. All of them use them synonymously. Thus the synonym for *infallible* is *inerrant*, and vice versa. For some strange reason people gag at the use of the word *inerrant* but do not seem concerned about the use of the word *infallible*. I shall use these words interchangeably…' 27, n. 1. Carl Henry makes a distinction, suggesting that the autographs of Scripture were inerrant, but that the copies are merely infallible, by which he means 'not prone to err…they are subject to incidental verbal variation and linguistic deviation [but] they faithfully convey the propositi*onal truth of the original.'* God, Revelation and Authority IV: Fifteen Theses Part III (Waco: Word, 1979), 220 n. 1. This is further spelt out on 243-55. I am grateful to the Rev. Jason Sexton for providing me with these references, and a copy of the text.

Scripture, has argued for a different view, suggesting that in Orr, Bavinck and Kuyper we find a distinct tradition of evangelical reflection on Scripture,[55] which he labels 'infallibility'. I am convinced that McGowan is right in finding a different trajectory to that of the inerrantists in these European writers, and if he wants to claim the term 'infallibility' to describe it, I will not refuse him it;[56] I demur, however, at his suggestion that this is what British Evangelical confessional writings meant by 'infallibility'.[57] Even if McGowan is right in his reading of the symbols, however, I note that he wants to distinguish between the *implications* of the two terms, not their *strength*; he writes '[i]n choosing "infallibility over "inerrancy", I am advocating an equally "high" but yet somewhat different theology of Scripture.'[58] So even if on the historical point McGowan is right and I am wrong, Warner's assumption of a gradation in 'strength' of doctrine does not hold.

What about 'authority'? Two comments seem in order: first, every single one of the British statements I surveyed affirmed the authority of the Bible, save only the Bournemouth declaration. So it is not a case that affirming 'authority' involves denying inerrancy or infallibility; rather, in British Evangelicalism, it is something constantly affirmed, alongside which other things may be affirmed. But if 'inerrancy' or 'infallibility' is not also affirmed, is the doctrine of Scripture thereby weaker? I suspect not; 'authority' is not a weak word; it is one that is arguably less than precise, or at least less than explicit, when it comes to matters of historical factual accuracy, but that is only to say that its primary semantic range lies elsewhere. Authority speaks of an ability to command, to demand acquiescence and obedience. If you want a slogan that heightens the distinction, inerrancy about changing minds, authority is about changing lives. To affirm authority without affirming inerrancy, as British Evangelicals have tended to do, is no weaker than affirming inerrancy without authority, which seems a common confessional position in the United States. The two positions do, however, place the emphasis on what the Bible does in a different place. Our two traditions think differently about the Bible, not on a 'conservative-radical' or 'right-left' axis, but in far more basic ways. The remainder of this essay will be devoted to exploring that difference.

Reasons for the difference

I have argued, then, that a commitment to inerrancy is nothing so simple as a more conservative doctrine of Scripture; rather it is an account of Scripture built

55 McGowan, 123-64.

56 I think it is true to say that in all McGowan's quotations from Orr and the Dutchmen, the word 'infallibility' is never used, although he demonstrates that each rejected the word 'inerrancy'.

57 See McGowan, 126, for this claim with explicit regard to the IVF/UCCF doctrinal basis, as used by Tyndale House.

58 McGowan, 49.

on a different account of the nature of the Bible. North American Evangelicalism, with a broad commitment to inerrancy, views the Bible primarily as a collection of facts to be believed; British Evangelicalism, stressing instead authority, views the Bible primarily as a collection of rules to be obeyed. Thus stated, the point is too crude, and I certainly do not want to press this distinction too hard, but it seems our differing confessional stances on Scripture force us to acknowledge that it is there.

A former student of mine, Jeff Oldfield, has ably explored the implications of a commitment to inerrancy in his doctoral thesis;[59] amongst them, he notes that inerrancy implies a commitment to a particular understanding of truth, what in philosophical terms is called a 'correspondence theory of truth'.[60] This is the notion that a proposition is true if it corresponds to the actual state of affairs – a common-sensical and attractive account, which nonetheless has some serious philosophical questions raised against it.[61] Historically, correspondence theories are associated with eighteenth-century views, particularly with the Enlighteners. Entranced and enamoured by the possibilities that Newton's physics had opened up, they looked for the same mechanical or mathematical description of the whole of reality. They fell in love with cold, hard facts.

In Europe, this was criticised around the turn of the eighteenth century. The critics, who began the Romantic movement, were often artists, and perhaps the root criticism was the sense that cold, hard facts are inadequate to express the deepest truths of human experience. I suspect the spectacular failure of the great European social experiment with Enlightenment thought was deeply influential, however: again and again one can find celebrations of the storming of

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59 Oldfield, *The Word Became…*

60 Article VI of CSBH is explicit: 'We affirm that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute. We further affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts.' Interestingly, the commentary claims that 'the same point was made in [CSBI] in Article XIII; Article XIII of CSBI states only that '[w]e deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose,' an uncontentious point that does not yet mean what CSBH claims it does.

61 For a helpful survey, see M.P. Lynch, ed. *The Nature of Truth* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001). The logical possibility of a correspondence theory of truth had already been questioned by St Thomas: *Augustinus… dicit quod 'verum est id quod est'… si… verum esset idem quod ens, esset nugatio dum dicitur ens verum, quod falsum est; ergo non sunt idem* (*De Veritate* 1.1), but the decisive questionings come with the rise of analytical philosophy, beginning perhaps in Frege's *De Gedanken* (see the various articles in M. Beaney & Erich H. Reck (eds) *Gotlobb Frege: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* vol. II (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005)). The success of such criticisms may be evaluated by the confession of a recent defender of correspondence theory, who notes 'the claim by some that the objections to the correspondence theory are insuperable' and 'the fact that it has not been defended for quite a while.' Andrew Newman, *The Correspodence Theory of Truth: An Essay on the Metaphysics of Predication* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 3.

the Bastille in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity in the juvenilia of those who would become the great Romantics, but when removing a king leads only to the enthronement of an emperor, and freedom leads to terror at home and imperial conquest abroad, all the hopes are dashed.[62]

Regardless of the reason, in Europe there is a strong reaction against the Enlightenment ideal that 'truth=fact'; the Romantic spirit assumes that truth is something far more personal than mere fact. The example I usually use with my own students concerns the romance and elopement of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett. The story is familiar enough: they became lovers; Elizabeth's father forebad the union; after some months of sorrow she escaped and they eloped to Italy. Such are the facts. Elizabeth wrote perhaps her best poetry to Robert during the waiting however, published as her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. The most famous begins 'How do I love thee? Let me count the ways…' In the forty-four sonnets of the collection Elizabeth describes her feelings for her forbidden lover, in phrases that, judged by the strict canon of factual accuracy, are regularly so extravagant as to be straightforwardly false.[63] I suggest, however, that the truth of the relationship of Elizabeth and Robert is more adequately found in the factually-inaccurate extravagancies of the poetry than in the bare recitation of the historical events.

This remains, of course, a suggestion, but I observe that it is one that was found convincing by much of British culture in the first half of the nineteenth century. We found a new vision of truth that was personal and existential. With regard to the Scriptures, whatever the defects of his worked out view, when Coleridge wrote '…whatever *finds* me, bears witness for itself that it has proceeded from a Holy Spirit…'[64] he captured, or perhaps in part created, a mood precisely: Scripture truth is that which speaks meaningfully to my heart, not that which corresponds exactly to the events of history.[65]

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62 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, to take only one example, wrote a rousing celebration of freedom and liberty in his poem on 'The Destruction of the Bastille' (1789-91): 'I see, I see! Glad liberty succeed / With every patriot virtue in her train!' By 1798, in 'France: An Ode', he confessed 'Forgive me, Freedom! O forgive those dreams! / I hear thy voice, I hear thy loud lament, / From bleak Helvitia's icy caverns sent- /… forgive me that I cherished / One thought that ever blessed your cruel foes!'.

63 To take only one example, the opening lines of Sonnet XXXVIII: 'First time he kissed me, he but only kissed / The fingers of this hand wherewith I write; / And ever since, it grew more clean and white… A ring of amethyst / I could not wear here, plainer to my sight, Than that first kiss…

64 S. T. Coleridge, *Confessions of an Enquiring Spirit* (ed. H. StJ. Hart) (London: A&C Black, 1956), 42.

65 McGowan points out that many of those who have opposed inerrancy have done so on the basis of the inadequacy of a 'dictation theory' of inspiration (see, e.g., 128 on Orr; 147-49 on Bavinck); Coleridge saw and named the problem, with a clarity and a power surely since unmatched, a century earlier: '[b]ut let me once be persuaded that all these heart-awakening utterances of human hearts – of men of like faculties and passions with myself, mourning, rejoicing, suffering, triumphing – are but as a *Divina*

Historians of British Evangelicalism have repeatedly stressed the influence of Romanticism on the development of the movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. Sometimes, indeed, the influence has been over-stressed, with the suggestion of an intrinsic connection between Romanticism and Evangelicalism. As David Bebbington has argued, however, this is to misunderstand eighteenth-century British Evangelicalism, which was not focused on emotion or experience; these characteristics, together with other Romantic hallmarks, such as a longing for a lost golden age of the church (Darby), come into Evangelicalism in the 1830s.[66] The vigorous movements of later Evangelicalism in Britain are repeatedly marked by Romantic culture, whether it be the holiness spirituality of the Keswick convention,[67] Liberal Evangelicalism between the wars,[68] or the new Pentecostalism.[69] I have argued elsewhere for this shift to a focus on immediate experience in British Evangelicalism,[70] and suggested it is due to the influence of Romanticism.[71]

It appears that American Evangelical theology is less affected by the Romantic movement; arguably American culture as a whole was.[72] The Romantic impulse in American religion affects theology only at the liberal and Unitarian end, through Emerson and the transcendentalists and on into Bushnell and others;[73] there was a distinctive and significant Romantic Evangelical spirituality on the

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Commedia of a superhuman – Oh bear with me, if I say – Ventriloquist; – that the royal Harper, to whom I have so often submitted myself as a *many-stringed instrument* for his fire-tipt fingers to traverse, while every several nerve of emotion, passion, thought, that thrids the flesh-and-blood of our common humanity, responded to the touch, – that this *sweet Psalmist of Israel* was himself as mere an instrument as his harp, an *automaton* poet, mourner, and supplicant; – all is gone, – all sympathy, at least, and all example.' (*Confessions*, 53).

66 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 80-81. See also Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

67 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 167-69; see also Ian M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918-1939* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 17-18.

68 See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 226; Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, 49, 56, 63.

69 So Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, 212.

70 Stephen R. Holmes, *Tradition and Renewal in Baptist Life: The Whitley Lecture 2003* (Oxford: Whitley, 2003), 18-20.

71 Stephen R. Holmes, 'British (and European) Evangelical Theologies' in Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (eds) *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 241-58; see 244-45.

72 In literary terms, 'American Romanticism' is limited to a tight group of writers (Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne, Melville), and confined to a few years in the middle of the nineteenth century; the Romantic impulse in culture was more widespread, of course, particularly in the celebration of the frontier spirit; it is also visible in such attitudes as the vision of the Confederacy.

73 Emerson had more influence on John Clifford, the British Baptist, than on any American Evangelical of whom I am aware. For some details, see Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation*, 167-77.

frontier, as Ralph Gabriel has described,[74] but it was 'folk-religion', lacking any theological sophistication or even articulation. It certainly did not impact Princeton seminary, or any leader involved in formulating Evangelical doctrinal statements or distinctives.[75] I propose that this fact is at least part of the explanation for the difference in doctrines of Scripture. A view of truth as fact, untainted by Romantic sensibilities, leads naturally to an account of the perfection of Scripture in terms of inerrancy; if truth is more about personal encounter, addressing the will as much as the mind, then Scripture will be understood primarily as authoritative.

Consequences of the difference

I have suggested, then, that the basic Evangelical accounts of the nature of Scripture on either side of the Atlantic are different; is this, however, just a difference in confessional terminology, or does it have consequences? I think the latter – let me explain.

Speaking as a British Evangelical, there are aspects of the American tradition that are simply foreign to me; from this side of the Atlantic, these can irritate because there is a tendency for our own press and wider church community, and for our American brothers and sisters, to assume that we British Evangelicals share in them. I suspect that they stem from this difference; equally, there are aspects of British Evangelicalism that, as far as I can observe, are less common in the American tradition, and I suspect they too stem from this difference.

British Evangelicalism has always rejected the 'fundamentalist' tag. In fact, we had a small and short-lived indigenous and self-proclaimed fundamentalist movement in the 1920s, and there is no question that, whilst more contained and less acrimonious, the same debates that split the American movement were engaged in here.[76] Nonetheless, the two most publicly visible distinctives of fundamentalism, anti-Darwinism and a futurist eschatology marked by a particular concern for the right temporal ordering of certain prophesied events in the end times, seem to me to be positions more naturally reached from inerrancy than authority.

Of course, neither position is necessarily demanded by a commitment to inerrancy, as evidenced by the example of B.B. Warfield, who, championing inerrancy, held to neither. If one's primary account of Scripture, however, is inerrancy,

74 Ralph H. Gabriel, 'Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth-Century America' Church History 19 (1950), 34-47; see especially 36-40.

75 William Dyrness asserts the influence of Romanticism on Evangelicalism on both sides of the Atlantic, but suggests: (a) that it was limited to a spirituality (he identifies the 'deeper life' teaching), seeing the key influence on theology as common-sense realism; and (b) that this influence was mediated from Britain (Keswick) to America, implying that the American origins of holiness teaching were either not inspired by Romanticism, or found no particular welcome at home.

76 On which see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 182, 217-20.

so that the truth of Scripture is identified primarily with the factual accuracy of its propositional content, then there would seem to be a pressure to receive Gen. 1, or indeed Rev. 20, as basically factual descriptions. A commitment to Scriptural authority, which sees truth in more Romantic terms as that which interprets and shapes life, is far more likely to either find in these texts poetic or trophic pointers to a spiritual or existential truth, or to be largely unconcerned about solving the question of the factual reference – it is hardly uncommon to hear British Evangelical preachers on Jonah, claiming that the book teaches lessons about God's faithfulness and mercy and our obedience, and that those lessons can be learnt with profit regardless of opinions about the actual existence of the big fish.

I suspect, therefore, that the relative indifference to creationism and premillenial eschatology in British Evangelicalism correlates to our particular view of Scripture. Equally, I suspect that our relative openness to charismatic renewal is a result of a more thorough-going Romanticism that finds experiential and existential expressions of faith, and straightforward supernaturalism, very congenial, a point which is related to, although less directly dependent on, the differing doctrines of Scripture I have been highlighting.

Evangelical ethics might be the hardest feature of our differing movements for my thesis to explain. It would appear that, in a more generally conservative stance to gender complementarity in marriage and ministry, for instance, American Evangelicalism honours precisely the authority of the Bible more than the British movement. This takes us back to the suggestion that, rightly or wrongly, British Evangelicalism is just more moderate, or more liberal, than its American counterpart.

In considering ethics, I want to make a distinction between (what I take to be) the sort of Biblical ethics that a commitment to Biblical inerrancy might evoke, and (what I take to be) the sort of Biblical ethics that a commitment to Biblical authority might evoke. Inerrantist ethics, and I think this is demonstrable in recent history, will find in the Bible a series of propositional claims as to how the world should be, and will construct ethical positions designed to promote those aims. Tithing, gender complementarity in marriage, and a forbidding of the pulpit to women, are obvious examples where precisely this pattern is followed. If the Bible is understood using Romantic notions of authority, however, there will be less focus on particular texts, and more on complex visions of the good life and thick descriptions of holiness. These will be formed less by the explicit teaching of particular texts than by an appropriation of the sweep of the Bible message.

Perhaps the most distinctive ethical stance of British Evangelicalism when compared to the American strand over the past 150 years has been the commitment to visions of social justice. This has been stronger or weaker, but was already the dividing point between the traditions in the 1840s, when on British insistence slave-owners were not permitted into the newly-formed World Evangelical Alliance, and was carried through the great ministries of Spurgeon and Booth and on into the twentieth century. Even more conservative bodies,

founded in the first half of the twentieth century when suspicion of the social gospel was at its height, demonstrate this inheritance: the CICCU ran, and partly funded, a mission in Bermondsey until very recently, for instance.

'Social justice' is a nebulous concept; whilst I would accept, indeed insist, that it is the core ethical message of the Scriptures, it is difficult to point to specific texts that demand it, even more to find texts that give us unambiguous directions on how to live out such a commitment. To take the original and obvious example, on the basis of the plain teaching of texts, it is far easier to defend slavery than to oppose it. If we take seriously Romantic understandings of the nature of written text, however, and see truth as a multi-layered and existential shaping of life, rather than as straightforward correspondence to fact, then we will be less concerned with the teaching of particular texts, and more with something like a 'biblical vision of life'. So I submit that even differing ethical traditions support my basic thesis in this lecture.

Towards an Evangelical doctrine of Holy Scripture

As I come towards a close, I must acknowledge that I have deliberately heightened the contrast between the two traditions that I have been exploring. None of us work with as pure a vision of truth as I have suggested – hence American Evangelicalism has been committed to social justice in various ways, and we have six-day creationism in Britain.[77] Thus far, I have also deliberately tried to avoid evaluative judgements, and attempted to do no more than describe and define. Some evaluation seems necessary before the lecture ends, however.

The question raised is how best to understand the claims Scripture makes upon us. I have suggested that an inerrantist position suggests fundamentally that Scripture demands to be believed, whereas an 'authoritarian' position suggests that Scripture demands to be obeyed or, perhaps better, to be lived. The first thing to say is that, as I have just noted, these are ideal types; the second thing to say, however, it that, as I have tried to show, they do assume different visions of truth. My own view is that a strict correspondence theory of truth, which seems to be assumed by any account of Biblical inerrancy, and which is affirmed in terms by the Chicago statements, is inadequate; nonetheless it is not difficult to find American Evangelical theologians asserting in the strongest possible terms that this is the only understanding adequate to Scripture, and that any qualification of this view is an accommodation to liberalism and/or postmodernism.[78]

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77 I observe in passing, however, that, on one touch-stone issue, it is precisely those bodies within British Evangelicalism that are in fact committed to the inerrancy of Scripture (Affinity and the FIEC) which have taken institutional stances against the ordination of women to preaching ministries.

78 To take some examples, selected fairly randomly off my own bookshelves, Don Carson in *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005)

Why, then, reject it? I happen to think that the philosophical objections, noted in passing above, are simply devastating, but I also think that there are good reasons based on classical Reformed theology, and on the nature of the Scriptures, that should lead us to reject such an account of truth. To take the theological point first, the Reformed orthodox were at one in declaring that saving faith had to go beyond mere assent to the factual accuracy of a position, and include personal appropriation. They therefore insisted that truth was something more than mere correspondence to facts. There are two standard distinctions: one differentiates temporary faith from saving faith, and forms part of the defence of the Calvinism of the Synod of Dort against Arminius and the Remonstrants; the other forms part of the Reformed polemic against Roman Catholicism, and distinguishes three elements of saving faith. The first insists that temporary faith consists of intellectual assent only, as opposed to saving faith, which involves the heart and will as well as the intellect. Heppe, in his great sourcebook, cites Calvin and Turretin, Charles Hodge's favourite theologian, as classical exponents of this division.[79] The second divides saving faith into *notitia*, or knowledge, *assensus*, or assent, and *fiducia*, or trust. Citing James 2:19, the Reformed insisted against the Roman Catholic Church that faith demanded more than a mere assent to the truth of the gospel history; indeed, they insisted that *fiducia* is the essence of saving faith. As the Reformed tradition developed, a scholastic dispute arose as to whether this act of trust, of apprehending the promises of the gospel as one's own, was a part of God's gift of faith, or a response to God's gift. Peter van Mastricht, the greatest of the Reformed in my – and Jonathan Edwards's – opinion, was of this view, describing faith as an act built upon a full knowledge of and assent to the truth of the gospel history, and a love of God and Christ, and a hatred of sin, an act of 'personal trust' which results in union with Christ.[80]

To these writers we might add the testimony of the Second Helvetic Confes-

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has much to say on the subject, especially on 103-38; M. J. Erickson, P. K. Helseth & J. Taylor include three whole chapters defending this view in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical accommodation in postmodern times* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004): Douglas Groothius, 'Truth Defined and Defended' (59-79); J. P. Moreland and G. DeWisse, 'The Premature Report of Foundationalism's Demise' (81-107); and R. Scott Smith, 'Language, Theological Knowledge, and the Postmodern Paradigm' (110-33).

79 Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics, set out and illustrated from the sources* (tr. G. T. Thomson) (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), 529, citing Turretin, *Inst. Elenc. Theol.* XV.xv.1 and Calvin, *Inst.* 3:2:11.

80 See Heppe, 533 for a lengthy translation of van Mastricht on the subject. Mastricht's whole treatment in the *Theoretico-Practica Theologia…* (*ed. nov.*) (Rhenum: Sumptibus Societatis, 1715) II.1 is worth reading. He begins by expounding Jn 1:11-12, and then offers a long dogmatic exposition of the act of saving faith. The first section of the elenctic part is devoted to the question of whether faith is merely intellectual assent, which opinion Mastricht ascribes to Roman Catholicism (II.1.xxii)

sion,[81] the Heidelberg Catechism,[82] and the Westminster Confession,[83] amongst other symbols. What, then, of the accusation that the idea that truth is something other than mere fact was an accommodation to theological liberalism or postmodernism? I submit, with all due respect to the proponents of this opinion, that acceptance of a doctrine held by all the orthodox Reformed from Calvin to Edwards, taught explicitly in Westminster and Heidelberg, and used to defend the five-point Calvinism of Dort, is not a huge concession to the liberal tradition… This, however, is still the opinions of human people, no matter how eminent, erudite or orthodox; and of symbols which remain *norma normata*; what of the *norma normans*, the Scriptures themselves?

The recent argument, such as it has been, has raged over interpretations of different texts of Scripture; I suspect that those who want to claim inerrancy as the primary attribute of Scripture have the worst of this argument, particularly when it comes to Jn 14:6,[84] but my own focus would be elsewhere, and in three places. First, the form of Scripture. Article VI of *CSBH* states 'We affirm that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements…'; one has to say that it is almost difficult to believe the framers of that article had opened a Bible. The varied literary forms of the Scriptures are rather obvious, and amongst them all perhaps only the OT wisdom literature and the NT epistles can be said to 'express God's truth in propositional statements'. For the rest, we find stories which imply rather than state truth, sometimes with deliberate allusiveness (Esther); laws which are clearly apodictic in form and so demand repeated re-interpretation and application; prophecy which, even within Scripture, has multiple references; apocalyptic; and poetry.

To fill this out, let me take just three examples. First, the Psalms. The Psalms are prayers; as such, they are examples of a literary form that basically makes no propositional assertion. When David prays 'Have mercy on me O God according to your unfailing love, according to the greatness of your compassion, blot out my sins…' (Ps. 51), his language is in the form of request, not assertion, and so has no propositional content. Lest this be thought an example of recent postmodern cleverness, let me just note that Aristotle already knew it in 350 BC, affirming straightforwardly that 'a prayer is a sentence, but is neither true nor false.'[85] A prayer may, however, like a narrative, be a guide to right living, and

81 Cap. XVI: 'Fides enim Christiana non est opinio ac humana persuasio, sed firmissima fiducia et evidens ac constans animi adsensus…'

82 See Q. 21: 'Was ist wahrer Glaube?
'Antwort. Es ist nicht allein eine gewisse Erkenntniß, dadurch ich Alles für wahr halte, was uns Gott in seinem Worte hat geoffenbaret, sondern auch ein herzliches Vertrauen, welches der heilige Geist durch's Evangelium in mir wirket…'

83 See Ch. XIV §II: 'By this faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word… But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life…'

84 See the fine treatment in Oldfield, *The Word Became Text…*, 129-33.

85 Οἷον ἡ εὐχὴ λόγος μέν· ἀλλ᾽ οὔτε ἀληθὴς οὔτε ψευδής (*De Interp.* 17).

because it conveys thick description by example, it will, at least potentially, be a better guide than mere propositions.

Second, take Nehemiah chapter 3, which a student of mine had to preach on recently. The text, in case it is not fresh in your memory, consists almost entirely of a list of people, and which bit of the walls or gates of Jerusalem they were responsible for rebuilding. This text does make propositional claims, but entirely uninteresting ones. Neh. 3 makes a series of historical statements that may well be accurate in every particular, but so what? How does knowing that Joiada son of Paseah, and not Malkijah son of Recab, repaired the Jeshanah Gate make any difference to – well, anything at all? Of course, the text is difficult to apply in any case,[86] but framing a doctrine of Scripture which insists that it is of primary importance to believe these things seems to me odd.

Third, consider the parable of the prodigal son in Lk 15: 'Then Jesus said, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father…"' There is a straightforward propositional claim in this parable, which I take to be false; I presume that there was in fact never a man who had two sons, that Jesus was telling a fictional story. More pointedly, I presume that the point of the text is to make a series of affirmations about God's welcome for the repentant sinner and the need of God's people, or those who consider themselves to be God's people, to share in that welcome, which are at no point stated as propositions. So the claim of the Chicago Statement, that Scripture 'expresses God's truth in propositional statements' is at the very least inadequate and misleading; Scripture does this, but as a very minor, and often incidental, part of its complete witness to God's truth.

Second, Scripture's self-attestation: I had occasion recently to consult a list of the Biblical claims about the Bible (or at least about 'the Word of God,' which both the compiler of the list and I took to be the same thing). What struck me in looking at this list is how often Scripture speaks of God's Word in profoundly active terms: God's Word, in Scripture, is not primarily communicative; it is creative, transformative, destructive – 'living and active' in the language of Hebrews. Here I simply observe that propositions are not active; whether J.L. Austin's account of *How to do Things with Words*, and the speech-act theory that has followed it, is the best alternative or not is of no moment here.

Third, we might consider the implied epistemologies, the accounts of truth assumed, in the Biblical writings. A recent volume on the subject, exploring the texts genre by genre, has found what Murray Rae described as 'striking consistency' between the views, and he suggests that St Thomas sums up this uniform nature of Biblical epistemology well when he writes ' "True" expresses the correspondence (*convenientia*) of being to the knowing power (*intellectus*), for all knowing is produced by an assimilation of the knower to the thing known…'[87]

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86 But see the helpful comments in the 'Explanation' section of H. G. M. Williamson's *Word Biblical Commentary* volume on *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Waco: Word, 1985).

87 Rae, '"Incline Your Ear So That You May Live": Principles of Biblical Epistemology' in Mary Healy and Robin Parry, (eds), *The Bible and Epistemology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 161-80, 161, citing Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 1.

This means, as Rae says, that the Scriptural texts are united in assuming that 'the knower is not left as she was but is transformed through the knowing process'.[88] An account of truth that does not include the transformation of life is inadequate to the Biblical assumptions.

So, I think there are very good reasons to resist a full-blown inerrantist account of truth as merely propositional truth and the Bible as no more than a compendium of true propositions. I feel more comfortable with the British tradition of insisting that the inspired text wants to do something, or, and perhaps better, that the Holy Spirit wants to do something through the inspired texts, and so that conformity of life is what the Scriptures demand. As van Mastricht put it in his summary statement of his doctrine of Scripture, 'it is evident that sacred Scripture is the perfect rule of living to God.'[89] That said, the Scriptures do make propositional claims, both vital ones ('On the third day he rose from the dead') and incidental ones ('Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate…'); faithfulness to the Christian tradition, and, the sort of rich account of truth I would want to embrace, leads me to believe, despite all the problems, that it is probably necessary to affirm that all such propositions are true. So if asked the narrow question, 'Is the Bible inerrant?' I think I want to say that it is, but that this is not an especially interesting or important claim. If I may return once again to the older Reformed dogmatics, which increasingly strikes me as a better guide in almost all matters of theology than anything else I know, they routinely distinguished between 'historical authority' and 'normative authority'; to quote Voetius's definitions, which represent the standard position, 'historical authority' means:

> 'H. Scripture is understood to be infallibly true… so far as the historical writers, in setting forth historically all the dogmas, decrees, words, deeds, good or bad, which are contained in the Bible, are believed to have received them from the mouth and by the direct revelation of God, and to have shewn them to us without any error.'[90]

'Normative authority', by contrast, means:

> 'the actual matter of the things contained in the Scriptures (e.g. decrees, sayings, doings) apart from the knowledge of them, oblige and constrain our consciences to faith in, observance and imitation of the things which are there said to be necessary to believe, observe and imitate.'[91]

Scripture presents to us a way of life – *the* way of life – it also happens to tell us some things about history and the like along the way; those things are accurate, but often unimportant.

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88 Rae, 'Incline…', 161.

89 Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, I.2.iii: 'Patet itaque, sacram Scripturam, perfectam esse Deo vivendi regulam.'

90 Tr. from Heppe, 27.

91 Again, tr. from Heppe, 27.

What, then, of an Evangelical confessional statement regarding Scripture? It seems to me that we must stress several things. First, the *divine origin* of Scripture, which I have largely assumed in this lecture, but which is of course vital; I have no quibble with the traditional word 'inspiration' here, or with the less Latinate 'God-breathed' which some seem to prefer. Second, as the discussion above indicates, I prefer the word 'authority' to any other to describe the primary call of Scripture upon us. Third, the present theological situation seems to require a subsidiary assertion of Scripture's accuracy in what it affirms – I will not baulk at 'inerrant', but 'truthfulness' or 'trustworthiness' seem to me to be more comprehensive terms that cope better with the actual literary forms of Scripture.

To these the older Reformed would add an assertion of Scripture's clarity or perspicuity, and of Scripture's sufficiency to salvation. These seem appropriate and vital. By the sovereign grace of God, the truth of Scripture is clear, luminously so, to the one who comes humbly seeking salvation, and it offers to such a one all that is necessary for her to be saved; confession of this fact is surely central to any properly Evangelical account of the doctrine of Scripture. By graciously inspiring the original writers of Scripture, and by gracious illuminating our minds, God has given us a written testimony of what he requires of us, a testimony which is truthful, and clear and complete in its essential points. This I offer, humbly but seriously, as a more adequate doctrine of Scripture than any I find in the Evangelical confessions, on either side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Abstract

This article examines confessional statements concerning the doctrine of Scripture issued by evangelical bodies in Britain and the USA. It demonstrates that the central American confession of the inerrancy of Scripture is almost wholly absent from British confessions. Rejecting the idea that this merely represents a weaker doctrine of Scripture amongst British Evangelicals, it suggests that there are broadly different models of Scriptural authority at work either side of the Atlantic, and traces these differences to the differing influence of the Romantic movement in the early Nineteenth century. Finally, it essays a doctrine of Scripture, that takes seriously the concerns of both British and American evangelicals.