

After Inerrancy: the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 1978-2005.

Gareth Lee Cockerill
Wesley Biblical Seminary
Evangelical Theological Society
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Inerrancy Affirmed

Throughout the first half of the 20th Century most Wesleyan/Holiness leaders joined other Evangelicals in affirming the inerrancy of Scripture.¹ Many of the founders of the Wesleyan Theological Society (hereafter WTS) had been active in the Evangelical Theological Society. Thus it was no surprise when the new society's articles of faith began with an affirmation of inerrancy: "We believe that both Old and New Testaments constitute the divinely-inspired Word of God, inerrant in the originals, and the final authority for life and truth." This statement appeared in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (hereafter *WTJ*) as the society's official position through 1969. However, in that year, when the Wesleyan Theological Society adopted an official constitution, the statement on Scripture was changed: "We believe in the plenary-dynamic and unique inspiration of the Bible as the divine Word of God, the only infallible sufficient and authoritative rule of faith and practice."² Please note that a statement about the Bible's "infallible" *function* has replaced a statement about its truthful *nature*. This change was a harbinger of things to come. In this new form the statement appeared in the *WTJ* through the spring issue, 1991. In 1991 the society dropped its confessional requirement and ceased publishing a statement of faith.³

Dr. Ralph Thompson, who was WTS secretary-treasurer in the late 1960's, appears to be representative of many inerrantists who were willing to accommodate the 1969 change because they believed it would not alter the character of the society.⁴ History has proved them wrong. What has happened in the WTS has not been the mere change of a word but a fundamental shift in the way the society views Scripture's nature and function. This shift became clear in Paul Bassett's influential article, "The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement, 1914-1940. The Church of the Nazarene: A Case Study," which appeared in the 1978 issue of *WTJ* (pages 65-91). Bassett argued that Fundamentalism had influenced Wesleyans to accept a doctrine of

¹ Paul Bassett's article, "The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement, 1914-1940. The Church of the Nazarene: A Case Study" [*WTJ* 13 (1978) 65-91] bears witness to this affirmation of inerrancy by early Holiness leaders. The Wesleyan Church added the following statement to its Articles of Religion in the 1955 *Discipline*: "These Scriptures we do hold to be the inspired and infallibly written Word of God, fully inerrant in their original manuscripts and superior to all human authority" [*Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America* (Syracuse: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Association, 1955) 12-13.

² J. G. Merrit, "Fellowship in Ferment, A History of the Wesleyan Theological Society, 1965-1984," *WTJ* 21 (1986) 185-203 (195). Until 1978 the following definition from the Random House Dictionary was inserted in parentheses after the word "infallible": "absolutely trustworthy and unailing in effectiveness or operation." Merrit, "Fellowship in Ferment," 196.

³ See the society's by laws as given in *WTJ* 25/1 (Spring 1991) 164-169.

⁴ In his secretary-treasurer's report to the 1967 meeting Thompson refers to "Many of my brethren" who will not affirm inerrancy "yet they appear to believe as strongly as I do in the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures" and recommends accommodating them "if a change in the wording in our doctrinal statement could be made that would protect our position." Quoted in Merrit, "Fellowship in Ferment," 195.

inerrancy that was inimical to the Wesleyan heritage. His conclusions have become the ‘orthodox’ position accepted without question by most subsequent Biblically-oriented articles in the *WTJ*.⁵ Only Daryl McCarthy’s “Early Wesleyan Views of Scripture” has challenged Bassett’s hegemony.⁶ McCarthy’s arguments have been ignored rather than answered. Thus, if we would understand the shift that has occurred in the *WTJ* and in its sponsoring society we must grasp the essence of Bassett’s approach.

Inerrancy Discarded A Paradigm Shift

It is important to begin by defining terms. What does Bassett mean by “inerrancy”? According to Bassett, the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy advocated by the Fundamentalists had Calvinist roots that expressed themselves in the following characteristics: 1) It based the truthfulness of Scripture on the inspiration of every word by the Holy Spirit.⁷ 2) Thus, inerrancy affirmed the detailed accuracy of these words.⁸ 3) Inerrantists defended the accuracy of the Bible by rational arguments, such as the consistency of Scripture, its moral superiority, and its ability to meet human need.⁹ Since inspiration applied only to the original writers, this degree of accuracy was appropriate only for the “original autographs.”

Why does Bassett argue that this position is alien to Wesleyan theology? 1) Wesleyan/Holiness theologians based their confidence in the authority of the Bible primarily on its saving message, culminating in Christ, rather than on a doctrine of verbal inspiration. 2) While affirming the truthfulness of Scripture’s message, Wesleyans have never been concerned with the accuracy of its details. 3) Wesleyans claim that the accuracy of this saving message is verified by the internal witness of the Spirit.

⁵ Merrit, “Fellowship in Ferment,” 185-203 cites Bassett in n. 43 but does not give his article the place it deserves in terms of its subsequent influence.

⁶ *WTJ* 6 (1981) 95-105. In addition, see McCarthy’s “Inerrancy in American Wesleyanism,” *Inerrancy and the Church* (ed. J. D. Hannah; Chicago: Moody, 1984) 279-321; and “Wesleyan Founders and Scripture: John Wesley, Adam Clarke and Richard Watson” (Evangelical Theological Society; Colorado Springs, 2001). The evidence presented by McCarthy is comprehensive and conclusive.

⁷ Thus while the Westminster Confession acknowledge a Christological/soteriological basis as well as a pneumatological, the Princetonians reduced this basis to pneumatology: “The infallibility and divine authority of the Scriptures are due to the fact that they are the word of God; and they are the word of God because they were given by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost” (C.A. Hodge, quoted in Bassett, “Fundamentalist Leavening” 68).

⁸ Bassett argues that the term “verbal inspiration” when first used in 1914 by B. F. Hayes in Nazarene publications did not mean what it later came to mean when used by the Fundamentalists (“Fundamentalist Leavening,” 71). He claims that it just meant that all of the Bible was inspired. Yet it is clear that in his book *All About the Bible*, which was part of the Nazarene course of study from 1914-1944, Sidney Collett used the term to argue that the very words of Scripture were inspired. How is this different from later usage? Bassett speaks of Collett stopping short of a “dictation theory” of inspiration. Is this what “verbal inspiration” came to mean? Most people who have held to inerrancy would reject dictation.

⁹ Bassett, “Fundamentalist Leavening,” 68. Thus Fundamentalists emphasized the Spirit’s inspiration of the text rather than witness to the veracity of the text. This position implies “that the proof of authority lies external to Christian experience” (Bassett, “Fundamentalist Leavening,” 68). For Wesleyans, on the other hand, “the authenticating voice of the Living Word clinched the matter” (Bassett, “Fundamentalist Leavening,” 69).

Scripture's claims are substantiated by the saving effect it produces rather than by rational and historical verification.¹⁰ It is the Bible's function that justifies its authority.

Bassett has drawn a stark "either/or" picture. Either the truthfulness of Scripture is based on inspiration by the Holy Spirit or the message of salvation in Christ. Either Christians were concerned about the detailed accuracy of the text or the truthfulness of its saving message. Either the accuracy of Scripture was defended by rational argument or by reference to the Scripture's salvific effect and function.¹¹ Such an either/or division is an anachronism that does violence to the historical data by forcing it into an alien mold. Even Bassett has to admit that the Reformation consensus on Scripture, shared by Wesleyans before the rise of Modernism, was "both/and." Before 1870 and the ascendancy of Modernism/Biblical criticism most theologians and virtually all lay people in America—even un-churched lay people—believed in the accuracy of the details of Scripture and its inspiration by the Holy Spirit.¹²

While imposing such a split on earlier writers is anachronistic, Bassett has succeeded in isolating the important emphases of the inerrantists. Thus he has given us a valuable tool whereby we can avoid anachronism by more objectively evaluating the continuity between the later inerrantists and the Wesleyan heritage before the Modernist controversy.¹³ There can be no question that the formulation of the doctrine of Scripture in terms of 'inerrancy' was the outcome of that controversy. However, on Bassett's own terms it is legitimate to say that earlier theologians were in agreement with the substance of 'inerrancy' if they held to the detailed accuracy of Scripture based on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and defended by rational argument.¹⁴ McCarthy's studies, cited above in

¹⁰Bassett, "Fundamentalist Leavening," 68-69. Bassett's appropriation of verification through the witness of the Spirit as the distinctive province of Wesleyan theology sounds hollow in light of the following quotation from Calvin's institutes: "But I answer, that the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted." *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1879), 1:72.

¹¹ Thus he says these differences did not appear before 1870 and the rise of Princetonian Fundamentalism within Calvinism. Bassett has just argued that this type of belief in inerrancy was contrary to both the Lutheran and Calvinist heritage, but now he is "inclined to believe" that inerrancy as thus formulated is a genuinely Calvinistic "mutation" ("Fundamentalist Leavening," 68). Failure to supply evidence at this point is telling, because Bassett's whole argument depends on inerrancy being Calvinist as opposed to Wesleyan. There are two ways to show a particular doctrine is part of a given theological tradition. One can demonstrate that it has been traditionally held by the proponents of that tradition, or one can argue that it is theologically consistent with that tradition. The first of these approaches is the more objective. Bassett has argued that inerrancy was not held by Calvinists before the Modernist controversy and has made no attempt to show that it was distinctively consistent with Calvinist theology.

¹² S. J. Lennox, "Biblical Interpretation in the American Holiness Movement: 1875-1920," *WTJ* 33/1 (Spring 1998) 29-30.

¹³ L. Shelton, "John Wesley's Approach to Scripture in Historical Perspective," *WTJ* 16/1 (1981) 23-50, fails to sustain his argument that inerrantists are reading their views back into Wesley because he has no clear criteria by which to determine anachronism.

¹⁴ Richard P. Thompson's assertion that Wesley should not be understood in terms of the later concerns of 'inerrancy' because his denial of errors in Scripture was a matter of emphasizing Scripture's divine origin. is a nonsequitur ["Inspired Imagination: John Wesley's Concept of Biblical Inspiration and Literary-Critical Studies" *WTJ* 34/1 (Spring 1999) 151-176 (153-54)]. It is for that very reason that the 'inerrantists' affirmed inerrancy!

note 8, amass overwhelming evidence demonstrating that Wesley and his successors held these convictions.

Nor is it legitimate to write off Wesley and those who followed him as “pre-modern.” They were post-Enlightenment people who were already grappling with the challenges that came to a head in the Modernist controversy.¹⁵ If defense of Scripture did not occupy the same prominence in their work it was only because the attack on Scripture had not reached the same intensity. Many of Wesley’s statements about Scripture, such as his assertion that if Scripture had one error it might as well have had a thousand, demonstrate his concern lest surrender of the detailed accuracy of Scripture invalidate the Bible’s teaching on the way of salvation.¹⁶ His statements often cited as evidence that he practiced the Biblical criticism of his day sound more like answers given in defense of Scripture’s accuracy.¹⁷

Early Wesleyan/Holiness leaders also affirmed the Bible’s comprehensive accuracy lest they invalidate its saving message.¹⁸ Thus it is more accurate to say that they accepted inerrancy for the same reason that the ‘Fundamentalists’ did than to say they were influenced by ‘Fundamentalists’ to accept something alien to their tradition. Bassett argues that the experientially oriented Holiness people were primarily interested

¹⁵This fact takes the force out of the following statement: “More to the point, nothing that Wesley believed changes the fact that in terms of intellectual history he was not *reacting* to modernity. But Liberalism and Fundamentalism are largely inexplicable except as reactions to modernity” [Frank Spina, “Wesleyan Faith Seeking Biblical Understanding,” *WTJ* 30/2 (Fall 1995), 26-49 (33). See Joel Green, “Reading the Bible as Wesleyans,” *WTJ* 33/2 (Fall 1998) 116-29 (120): “Moreover, labeling Wesley’s hermeneutic in this way overlooks the degree to which Wesley himself participated in the Enlightenment project—according significance in his theological enterprise to Reason, limiting the authoritative voice of Scripture in deference to scientific discovery, and even engaging in the empirical method of contemporary science.”

¹⁶On Wesley’s belief in the detailed accuracy of Scripture see W. M. Arnet, “John Wesley and the Bible,” *WTJ* 3/1 (Spring 1968) 3-9. In commenting on a certain Mr. Jenyn Wesley said: “If he is a Christian, he betrays his own cause by averring that “all Scripture is not given by inspiration of God, but the writers of it were sometimes left to themselves, and consequently made some mistakes.” Nay, if there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth.” [John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols., ed. Nehemiah Curnock (London: Epworth Press, 1909; rep. Ed. 1938), 6:117.]. For innumerable supporting quotations from Wesley and his followers see the articles by McCarthy in footnote 8 above.

¹⁷ For instance, his discussion of the differences between the genealogies of Matthew and Luke on p. 15 of *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* [cited by Larry Shelton, “John Wesley’s Approach to Scripture in Historical Perspective,” *WTJ* 16/1 (1981) 23-50 (40)] and his comments on the composition of the OT historical books, “It seems the substance of the several histories was written under divine direction when the events had just happened, and long after put into the form wherein they stand now, perhaps all by the same hand” [cited by G. Lyons, “Hermeneutical Bases for Theology: Higher Criticism and the Wesleyan Interpreter,” *WTJ* 18 (Spring 1983) 63-78 (65)].

¹⁸ See, for instance, B. F. Hayes in “Verbal Inspiration,” *Herald of Holiness*, October, 15, 1913, p. 1 [quoted in Bassett, “Fundamentalist Leavening,” 70-71]: “Yes blessed be God, this inspiration of the Bible is verbal in the most acute, intense, literal, all inclusive sense. Nothing short of this would be like or worthy of God, and nothing short of this would meet man’s need.” On Hayes’ use of the term “verbal inspiration” see note 8 above. Hayes clearly defends the accuracy of Scripture in order to preserve its saving function. Note also the following statements in the 1960 issue of *WTJ* confirm this assertion: “Once sufficient doubt is cast upon the Bible as a body of objective truth, it will cease to be either an instrument of faith or a standard of practice” [W. Ralph Thompson, “Facing Objections Raised Against Biblical Inerrancy,” *WTJ* 3/1 (Spring 1968) 21-29 (21)]. “The authority of Jesus is at stake in the question of the inerrancy of the New Testament.” The validity of redemption is likewise at stake.” [both quotes from W. T. Dayton, “Theology and Biblical Inerrancy,” *WTJ* 3/1 (Spring 1968) 30-7(36)].

in the saving function of the Bible. They were, however, influenced by the inerrancy of the more rationalistically oriented Princeton Theologians like A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield. It would be more accurate, however, to compare Holiness leaders with 'Fundamentalists' like Dwight L. Moody and R. A. Torrey, the popularizers of inerrancy. Both Wesleyan/Holiness leaders and Moody were ardently concerned with Scripture's 'saving function.' Both emphasized the salvation of souls and the infilling of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ Thus they, like Moody, defended Scripture's inerrancy lest they compromise Scripture's saving message.²⁰ Even those Holiness people who claimed that the experience of entire sanctification overcame all the objections of Biblical criticism bear witness to this link between salvation and the need for an accurate Bible.²¹ Thus the Holiness leaders of the first half of the 20th Century accepted inerrancy along with those called 'Fundamentalists.' They did so in order to protect the saving message of Scripture. In so doing they were following their mentor Wesley and his earlier disciples.

Inerrancy Discarded The Unhappy Consequences

The change in the *WTJ*'s perspective on Scripture flows from the wedge that Bassett has driven between the saving effect of Scripture and its comprehensive accuracy. To be fair, Bassett distinguishes between belief in the detailed accuracy of Scripture and the accuracy of its saving message centering in Jesus Christ. However, since that saving message is verified by its effect (i.e. 'the witness of the Spirit') without rational argument his typology tends toward a division between the (saving) effect of Scripture experienced in the life of people and its factual and referential truthfulness. To be Wesleyan, then, is to affirm Scripture's soteriological function but to refuse to affirm its comprehensive accuracy. It is this perspective on Scripture that has been regnant in the pages of *WTJ* since Bassett's article and the abandonment of inerrancy.²²

¹⁹ Bassett obscures the issues by emphasizing the contrast between the concerns of early Holiness leaders and those of the Princeton Theologians so influential in the development of the doctrine of inerrancy. He affirms that Moody and Torrey made the doctrine of inerrancy popular.

²⁰ The following quotation is typical of the way Moody linked the saving message of Scripture with its detailed truthfulness: "Now, my friends, bear in mind that God's word is true, and it will help you wonderfully when you take up that word of God, to realize that every word of it is true. Infidels and sceptics will try to make you think it is not true. When they come to me and say that, I tell them 'Well, if you can get me a better Bible, I will give this up, but not until then.' But when there is no book that will bear any comparison with it or touch it, why should we give it up? What has infidelity to give us in the place of it? Bear in mind that these Promises are all true. 'He staggered not at the promises of God.' Abraham was fully persuaded that God was able to do what he had promised to do." from "Address to Young Converts" (closing services at the N. Y. Hippodrome) 446-460 (453-54) in *Glad Tidings. Comprising Sermons and Prayer-Meeting Talks* by D. L. Moody (New York: E. B. Treat, 1876).

²¹ Lennox, "Biblical Interpretation in the American Holiness Movement," 30-31.

²² Al Coppedge's 1984 cogent defense of Wesley as an advocate of *Sola Scriptura* is representative of the few articles that seem uninfluenced by Bassett. Limitations of space have prevented consideration of Clark H. Pinnock's two articles, "Evangelical Theologians Facing the Future: Ancient and Future Paradigms," *WTJ* 33/2 (Fall 1998) 7-28.; "Biblical Texts, Past and Future Meanings," *WTJ* 34/2 136-151. Pinnock writes from a broader Evangelical perspective and does not attempt to justify his approach by reference to Wesley or Wesleyan theology. He affirms the Spirit's inspiration of Scripture and does not formally separate the truthfulness of Scripture from its effect. However, he leaves considerable latitude for varieties of interpretation due to the location of the reader and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Obviously, abandonment of the comprehensive accuracy of Scripture opened the door to a wholesale use of Biblical criticism that would have been unacceptable to inerrantists. Articles written in the early 1980's appear to have the purpose of convincing more conservative colleagues to adopt these current methodologies. Thus John Hartley (1982) argues for their usefulness while cautioning against the naturalistic presuppositions upon which they are based and their exclusion of the action of a transcendent God.²³ However, Hartley's respondent, Sherrill F. Munn, whole heartedly recommends these methods naively minimizing Hartley's cautions against their naturalistic foundations and denying any "necessary conflict between the critical method of the university and the theological concern of the seminary."²⁴ While admitting that Wesley sounds like he believed in inerrancy, George Lyon (1983) advocates the use of modern critical methods because Wesley used the critical methods common in his day.²⁵ Finally, in his 1984 study William Abraham affirmed that scholars carry on the "classical" Wesleyan tradition when they reject "verbal" inspiration and adopt "the whole range of modern biblical research."²⁶ It is as if these authors, except for Hartley, have forgotten that such things as form criticism were developed as an explanation of the origin of the Biblical text without reference to God's transcendent intervention.²⁷ More than a decade later George Lyons continues this line of argument in his presidential address, "Wesleyan Theology and Biblical Theology." Lyons rehearses the vast diversity of Scripture and the indeterminacy of the canon as established by reductionist Biblical criticism. His proposal for a "Wesleyan" NT theology betrays a thoroughly functional view of Scripture: "A Wesleyan New Testament theology need not be dogmatic even in its theological reflection upon faith in Jesus Christ because its real concern is to give an account of the foundational encounters with Christ, which may serve as the basis for

²³ J. E. Hartley, "Old Testament Studies in the Wesleyan Mode," *WTJ* 17 (Spring 1982) 58-76. Hartley argues that the inductive method is particularly appropriate for Wesleyans because it is based on a synergism that recognizes the divine/human nature of Scripture and human responsibility. See pp. 58-61.

²⁴ S. F. Munn, "Old Testament Studies in a Wesleyan Mode: A Response to the Paper Presented by Dr. John Hartley," *WTJ* 17 (Spring 1982) 77-84. (81).

²⁵ G. Lyons, "Hermeneutical Bases for Theology: Higher Criticism and the Wesleyan Interpreter," *WTJ* 18 (Spring 1983) 63-78. What Lyon actually says is, "At times Wesley does sound like a Fundamentalist . . ." His undefined use of "Fundamentalist" is misleading. Just because Wesley believed Scripture was without error does not mean he was a "Fundamentalist."

²⁶ W. J. Abraham, "Inspiration, Revelation and Divine Action: A Study in Modern Methodist Theology," *WTJ* 19/2 (Fall 1984) 38-51.(48). There appears to be some inconsistency in Abraham's argument. While he claims, as noted above, that the use of Biblical criticism is in accord with "classical" Wesleyanism, yet he admits that Olin C. Curtis (1850-1918) and Henry C. Sheldon (18345-1928) introduced changes in that heritage in the face of the issues, presumably involving Biblical criticism, of their day. See page 41. Abraham cites Bassett in note 51 on page 51.

²⁷ Compare Robert W. Wall, "The Future of Wesleyan Biblical Studies," *WTJ* 33/2 (Fall 1998), 101-2: "I want to emphasize the corrupting nature of the modern academy itself, which is profoundly skeptical of the supernatural and deeply suspicious of constructions of transcendent truth, scholarly and especially popular in nature." Also note Frank Spina, "Whatever else it means to be Wesleyan, or to approach Scripture as a Wesleyan it cannot mean something besides a *theological* approach. . . . Approaches to the Bible which ignore or undercut the basic premises requisite to a full-orbed theological understanding of Scripture cannot be appealed to as though those premises are irrelevant to the hermeneutical task" ("Wesleyan Faith Seeking Biblical Understanding," *WTJ* 30/2 (Fall 1995) 26-49 (36).

judging the faithfulness of contemporary encounters with him.”²⁸ And Bultmann said, “Amen.”

Turning again to the early 1980’s, J. Kenneth Grider’s “Wesleyanism and the Inerrancy Issue”²⁹ follows immediately after Abraham’s article cited above. Grider discusses the removal of inerrancy from the WTS statement of faith in 1969-70. Although he was an advocate of that removal, his position is hardly distinguishable from inerrancy: he does not affirm that there are errors in Scripture, but he thinks there could be inconsequential errors.³⁰ What he advocates hardly opens the door to the wholesale appropriation of modern Biblical criticism. His article’s juxtaposition with those cited above shows how much the WTS had changed between 1970 and 1984.

The issue of the Journal that contained Lyon’s presidential address was dedicated to papers presented at the WTS’s thirtieth anniversary on the theme “Asserting Our Biblical Heritage.”³¹ In this issue John W. Wright, Brian P. Stone, and Timothy R. Dwyer’s articles are important for our study.³² Wright draws on OT criticism; Stone, on liberation theology; and Dwyer, on Paul’s use of the OT.

Dwyer invokes Paul’s handling of the “law” in Galatians as justification for the Holiness movement’s “limitation/extension/adaptation of the application of scripture in dialogue with tradition, reason, and Spirit-experience in local communities of believers.”³³ Although he does not openly question the Bible’s accuracy his position tends to move the locus of authority from the text of Scripture to the interpreting community.

Wright is forthright in his location of authority in the function of Scripture and in his denial of its accuracy.³⁴ The OT is the sectarian document of a minority who re-wrote the polytheistic history of Israel in monotheistic terms in order to create an exilic or post-exilic community loyal to Yahweh. The authority of this text does not lie in its historical accuracy but in its power, through re-written history, to create a new community. So with Wesleyans it is not the historical accuracy of Scripture but its power to create renewed

²⁸ George Lyons, “Presidential Address: Biblical Theology and Wesleyan Theology,” *WTJ* 30/2 (Fall 1995), 7-25 (17). Lyons naively attempts to identify Wesleyan theology with the goals of Biblical theology when he says, “To be Wesleyan is to read the Bible with no prior constraint as to what it may mean.” (23).

²⁹ *WTJ* 19/2 (Fall 1984) 52-61.

³⁰ I find Grider’s article somewhat confusing. He seems to identify inerrancy with verbal dictation. The reasons he gives to show that their might be ‘errors’ in the text, such as the addition of the Hebrew vowel points and the NT’s quotation of the old, actually prove that there are the kind of ‘errors’ to which he is referring. Most inerrantists would define ‘error’ differently.

³¹ D. A. Thorsen, “Future of Biblical Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition: A Theological Perspective,” *WTJ* 30/2 (Fall 1995) 182-202. (182).

³² J. W. Wright, “Toward a Holiness Hermeneutic: The Old Testament Against Israelite Religion,” *WTJ* 30/2 (Fall 1995) 68-90; B. P. Stone, “Wesleyan Theology, Scriptural Authority, and Homosexuality,” *WTJ* 30/2 (Fall 1995) 108-38; and T. R. Dwyer, “Paul and Scripture in the Second Temple: Light on the Wesleyan Biblical Heritage,” *WTJ* 30/2 (Fall 1995) 91-107. The articles by D. Flemming (“The Third Horizon: A Wesleyan Contribution to the Contextualization Debate,” 139-63); C. E. Jones (“Reclaiming the Text in Methodist-Holiness and Pentecostal Spirituality,” 164-81); F. A. Spina (“Wesleyan Faith Seeking Biblical Understanding,” 26-49); and D. A. Thorsen, (“Future of Biblical Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition: A Theological Perspective,” 182-202) are all helpful but not as directly germane to our topic. Consideration will be given to Robert Wall’s contribution below.

³³Dwyer, “Paul and Scripture in the Second Temple,” 107.

³⁴Wright, “Toward a Holiness Hermeneutic,” 68-90.

people in a renewed community that is crucial.³⁵ Stone admits that his proposal goes beyond the historical precedent established by Wesley.³⁶ He argues, however, that he is consistently Wesleyan because he is applying a Wesleyan understanding of grace to the doctrine of revelation. God's grace does not coerce human beings to believe but enables and invites their obedience. So, God's revelation does not force human beings to accept a set of truths because the Bible asserts them to be true but invites human beings to reinterpret their own experience in the light of the Biblical text and to accept what is credible in light of that experience. He tacitly admits that this method could result in a rejection of the "plain" meaning of Scripture. In reality the Bible has become a means of interpreting one's experience rather than one's experience being an aid in understanding the Scripture.³⁷

Canonical criticism and text/reader-centered approaches to Scripture are compatible with a functional approach to Biblical authority. Thus, it is not surprising that a number of contributors to *WTJ* have adopted these methodologies. There is much to commend the canonical approach advocated by Robert Wall in three articles written from 1987 to 1998³⁸ This methodology is also affirmed by Frank Spina and by Joel Green in his response to Wall's third article.³⁹ Wall's focus on the wholeness of Scripture and its self-correcting variety is a helpful antidote to atomistic Biblical interpretation. There is also truth in his contention that the various theological traditions within the Christian Church need to listen to one another because each reflects various emphases in Scripture.⁴⁰ There is no naivete in his concern over the regnant naturalism characteristic of modern Biblical studies.⁴¹ His desire to recover the Bible for the church and for its original purpose of nurturing the people of God is highly commendable. Nevertheless, he moves the authority of Scripture from its origin in God to its formation by the church.⁴² It

³⁵ "A holiness hermeneutic would shift biblical authority from 'behind the text' in its historical accuracy or the experience of its authors—or even the Israelite community, to 'in front of the text' as it was embodied within the social circumstances of its production and the history of its reception, and how it might be embodied within the contemporary community of believers." Wright, "Toward a Holiness Hermeneutic," 88.

³⁶ Stone, "Wesleyan Theology, Scriptural Authority, and Homosexuality," 108-38.

³⁷ Stone's article deserves more comprehensive interaction than is possible in this article. He makes a fundamental error, however, when says that to believe the Bible because of its own truth claims is coercive. Protestants have always taught that ascent to Scripture was brought about by the witness of the Spirit. The question of coercion is a matter of whether the Spirit forces or enables a believing response. No Christian, however, would be expected to believe, nor would the Spirit bear witness to, what the Bible did not claim to be true. Stone sets up a false dichotomy between the Scripture as a repository of divine truth and a means by which our understanding of our experience (to use his manner of speaking) is transformed.

³⁸ R. W. Wall, "Law and Gospel, Church and Canon," *WTJ* 22/1 (Spring 1987) 38-70; "Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutic of Scripture," *WTJ* 30/2 (Fall 1995) 50-67; "The Future of Wesleyan Biblical Studies," *WTJ* 33/2 (Fall 1998) 101-15.

³⁹ Frank A. Spina, "Wesleyan Faith Seeking Biblical Understanding," *WTJ* 30/2 (Fall 1995) 26-49; Joel B. Green, "Reading the Bible as Wesleyans," *WTJ* 32/2 (Fall 1998) 116-29.

⁴⁰ See especially the first article above, "Law and Gospel, Church and Canon."

⁴¹ Wall, "The Future of Wesleyan Biblical Studies," 101-4.

⁴² Note the following expressions in "The Future of Wesleyan Biblical Studies": "what the church formed Scripture to do" (103); "the church to which Scripture belongs" (104); "the church's intentions for Scripture" (106); etc. He does say, "Indeed, the coherence and unity of the Bible's theological subject matter may well force us back to a precritical-disposition view that Scripture is a book finally authored by the one true and holy God and read best in terms of divine intent and therefore toward the end of our entire sanctification" (109-10). But he immediately qualifies this statement in a footnote: "This shift of focus

is the function of Scripture as canon in the community of faith that gives it authority. Thus he minimizes the meaning of the ‘original authors’ in favor of the canonical meaning of a passage or book.⁴³ In fact, the example he uses from the book of Acts implies that the ‘original author’s’ meaning was deliberately inaccurate.⁴⁴ While eschewing relativism, Wall shows affinities with the text/reader approaches to be described below when he argues that the definitive canonical meaning of a passage includes a multiplicity of meanings brought out by various interpreters in various social locations. Thus he can say, “In fact, the meaning of a particular text is produced from within a particular social location”⁴⁵ and “the meaning of Scripture is itself transformed by the interpreter’s attempts to understand the will and Word of God for the current people of God.”⁴⁶ The canonical approach finds its point of contact with this emphasis on the reading community because the canon itself derives its authority from its formation and acceptance by the community of faith.⁴⁷ It is clear, then, that Wall locates the authority of Scripture in its canonical function within the believing community rather than in its comprehensive truthfulness resulting from its origin in God. The Scriptures were not produced by the inspiration of the Spirit, rather “the Spirit of God is at work, inspiring biblical texts to function in inspiring ways.”⁴⁸ Wall co-opts John Wesley for this functional view of Scripture by anachronistically severing what Wesley says about Scripture from the way he uses it: while Wesley’s statements affirm the sole authority of a completely accurate Scripture, Wesley’s use of Scripture shows that its authority rests

from the authorial to the divine intent of Scripture envisages a theological commitment to Scripture’s role as the church’s canon rather than to some conception of its production” (110, n. 12). Compare Frank Spina’s critique of James Sanders’ advocacy of a canonical approach to Scripture, “This grounds Scripture in an *anthropology* wherein the community’s self-identity is paramount rather than in a *theology* wherein God’s initiatives and claims on the community of faith are paramount” (italics original; “Wesleyan Faith Seeking Biblical Understanding,” 38).

⁴³ “The Future of Wesleyan Biblical Studies,” 104-6.

⁴⁴ Wall’s position is clearly demonstrated in “The Future of Wesleyan Biblical Studies,” 104, n. 6. He argues that we should read Acts in its canonical function as an introduction to the Pauline epistles although it was originally written to defend Paul and his universal mission against the Palestinian Jewish Church. Although Wall refrains from saying so, almost all who hold that Acts was originally written to defend Paul in this way argue that Acts has intentionally misrepresented the facts. I have no objection to a Biblical book having a larger function in the canon that grows out of its original purpose. Here, however, the ‘legitimate’ canonical function of a book is totally separate from its truthfulness—or in this case, its lack of truth.

⁴⁵ Wall, “The Future of Wesleyan Biblical Theology,” 112.

⁴⁶ Wall, “Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutic of Scripture,” 65, n. 32, citing Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroads, 1983), 34.

⁴⁷ Russell Morton’s criticism of Wall and Green misses this connection: “Perhaps we see here one of the greatest difficulties in integrating a reader response methodology into the principles Wall and Green propose, for the reader, not the text, seems to be the ultimate authority in reader response methodology. This is in diametric opposition to reading the text as authoritative” [Russell Morton, “Studying Text in a Wesleyan ‘Context’: Response to Robert Wall and Joel Green,” *WTJ* 34/1 (Spring 1999) 243-57 (247, n. 22)]

⁴⁸ “The Future of Wesleyan Biblical Studies,” 112. . Wall (“Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutic of Scripture,” 56, n. 2.) refers favorably to John E. Stanley, “Elements of a Postmodern Holiness Hermeneutic Illustrated by Way of the Book of Revelation,” *WTJ* 28/1 (Spring 1993) 23- 43 (8-10). Stanley argues that inspiration applied to the original authors, not to the texts they produced, and emphasized the role of the Spirit in interpreters today.

in its saving function.⁴⁹ Attention to the way Wesley employs Scripture in controversy would correct this imbalance.⁵⁰

In his response Joel Green affirms Wall's position and celebrates Wall's advocacy that Wesleyans intentionally do Biblical interpretation from their own social location. Yet he offers several wholesome cautions. First, he urges Wesleyans to allow the text to question the basic assumptions that they bring to Scripture.⁵¹ Second, he is ready to accept the "literal" meaning of Scripture understood as the sense the author intended so far as it is objectively embodied in the text and read in light of the general tenor of Scripture.⁵²

In light of his response to Wall, it is no surprise that Joel Green thinks the contemporary emphasis on text/reader approaches to Biblical interpretation a great opportunity for Wesleyans to contribute within the larger field of Biblical studies.⁵³ In addition to the article by Green, two articles by Richard P. Thompson and one by Thomas E. Phillips advocate that Wesleyans employ these methods.⁵⁴ All three writers draw upon the work of Wolfgang Iser. Green contends that by recognizing the role of the community in the understanding of the Bible these approaches open the way for a restoration of church-centered Biblical interpretation. Thus, they encourage Wesleyans to do interpretation that is self-consciously Wesleyan for the benefit of the Wesleyan community of faith. Such Wesleyan Biblical interpretation will intentionally emphasize things like the "primacy of grace" and the "pursuit of holiness."⁵⁵ In line with his response to Wall mentioned above, he does admit that Wesleyans must allow the text of Scripture to challenge the presuppositions they bring to it. He also offers criteria for valid interpretation including the coherence of the text, the social background of its language, and the "rule of faith."⁵⁶ This last criterion establishes the bridge with a canonical approach to Scripture for it is the "rule of faith" that led to the formation of the canon. Furthermore, the emphasis of these methods on what happens in the reader is congruent with the Wesleyan emphasis on the soteriological purpose and function of Scripture.

On these bases Green is forthright in advocating that Wesleyans construct their understanding of Scripture's authority in terms of its soteriological function rather than on the basis of its truthful content. He argues that the larger Evangelical community's

⁴⁹See Wall, "Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutic of Scripture," pp. 56-57, esp. note. 19.

⁵⁰ Mention of theological controversy underscores one final problem with Wall's approach: various interpretive traditions have affirmed contradictory interpretations of such fundamental things as the nature of sin, grace, and salvation. The only court for their adjudication is the text itself.

⁵¹ Joel Green, "'Reading the Bible as Wesleyans,'" 33/2 (Fall 1998) 116-29 (122): "Second, we must allow that, even though we come with certain theological, even ideological commitments to Scripture, we do so in order . . . to penetrate so deeply into the text that even these assumptions are called into question, tested, and revised by the subject matter." Quoting Brevard S. Childs, "Toward Recovering Theological Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997), 16-26 (19).

⁵²Green, "Reading the Bible as Wesleyans," 123-24 (esp. n. 16).

⁵³ Joel B. Green, "Contribute or Capitulate? Wesleyans, Pentecostals, and Reading the Bible in a Post-Colonial Mode," *WTJ* 39/1 (Spring 2004) 74-90.

⁵⁴ Richard P. Thompson, "Inspired Imagination: John Wesley's Concept of biblical Inspiration and Literary-Critical Studies," 34/1 (Spring 1999) 151-76; "Community in Conversation: Multiple Readings of Scripture and John Wesley's Ecclesiology," *WTJ* 35/1 Spring, 2000, 200-215; and Thomas E. Phillips, "Reading Theory and Biblical Interpretation," *WTJ* 35/2 (Fall 2000) 32-48.

⁵⁵Green, "Contribute or Capitulate?," 85.

⁵⁶Green, "Contribute or Capitulate?," 89-90.

affirmation of Scriptural accuracy has not led to agreement on what Scripture teaches. Furthermore, Evangelicals have mistreated Scripture as if it were a set of propositions.⁵⁷ Citing William Abraham's book, to be discussed below, he says Wesleyans should not use Scripture as an "epistemological norm" but "in ways more congenial to our heritage."⁵⁸ However, Green contradicts himself. He argues that Wesley did not base the authority of the Bible on its being an "epistemic norm." Then he supports this position by quoting Wesley's famous statement that the Bible is the book that enables a person "to *know* one thing—the way to heaven" (italics added).⁵⁹

Richard P. Thompson's two articles on text/reader centered approaches to Scripture are largely congruent with the views expressed by Green. His first study makes a unique contribution by identifying points of contact between these text/reader-centered hermeneutics and Wesley's approach to Scripture.⁶⁰ He draws attention to Wesley's convictions that the Spirit inspired Scripture, that the Scripture text was meant to affect the reader, and that both the illumination of the Spirit and the obedience of the reader were necessary for this effect to take place. The inspiration of the Spirit parallels the literary-critical assertion that the author has imaginatively arranged the discourse to have a certain effect. The illumination of the Spirit is, then, at work in the way the obedient reader fills in the gaps left by the author and through "inspired imagination" recreates the text according to the clues embedded by the author. True 'recreation' of the text produces personal and social transformation through the same Spirit. Thompson admits that Wesley believed in the truthfulness of the Biblical text, but thinks that his statements about inerrancy have been misinterpreted when brought into the modern debate. Wesley believed the Scriptures came from God, but he did not believe that they had been 'dictated' and his main concern was with their saving message.⁶¹ Thompson appears to identify modern belief in inerrancy with such 'dictation.'

Much of what Thompson says in his second article is in accord with the positions taken by Wall and Green. In light of the social nature of knowledge, the proper place for interpretation is the church for which the Bible was given.⁶² Multiple interpretations arise from the differences among people in the church as one benefits from and contributes to the tradition. The church provides the context for evaluating interpretations, which, to be valid, must effect edification. A Wesleyan church-context will privilege the transforming role of grace in the believer's life.

Thomas E. Phillips, however, has developed the potential skeptical implications of this reader-oriented approach to Scripture.⁶³ He argues that meaning resides in the interaction between the reader and the text—not in the author's intentions or the text itself. Readers integrate both the determinative and non-determinative aspects of the text into a coherent whole in accord with their own presuppositions and not according to the author's intentions. Since the influence of the reader's background begins at the

⁵⁷Green, "Contribute or Capitulate?," 82-83.

⁵⁸Green, "Contribute or Capitulate?," 83.

⁵⁹Green, "Contribute or Capitulate?," 88.

⁶⁰ Richard P. Thompson, "Inspired Imagination: John Wesley's Concept of biblical Inspiration and Literary-Critical Studies," 34/1 (Spring 1999) 151-76.

⁶¹Thompson, "Inspired Imagination," 155-57, 161-62; 171-72.

⁶² Richard P. Thompson, "Community in Conversation: Multiple Readings of Scripture and John Wesley's Ecclesiology," *WTJ* 35/1 Spring, 2000, 200-215.

⁶³Thomas E. Phillips, "Reading Theory and Biblical Interpretation," *WTJ* 35/2 (Fall 2000) 32-48.

unconscious level, the reader has no unmediated access to the text or author. The reader, then, should intentionally integrate the text in a way that not only is coherent and does justice to the text's determinative elements, but also serves the needs of the reader's community. Thus, in a Christian context, 'revelation' takes place on this side of the text, when the reader integrates the text into a coherent whole with reference to the community of faith. When this happens 'revelation' is an encounter with the 'Living Word' through the 'written word' "validated by the activity (witness) of the Spirit within the community."⁶⁴ Such skepticism about the meaning intended by author/text, however, makes 'revelation' a community construct. How can one know that this "encounter" is indeed with the Christ known by the Gospels writers if one cannot know what the Gospel writers meant? How does one know that the community's validation is really the result of the Spirit's witness if one cannot know what the Bible says about the Spirit? When the function of the text has completely swallowed its referential integrity, one is left with nothing more than communal subjectivity.

We have noted above Green's favorable citation of William Abraham's *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism*. Stanley Grenz's extensive review of *Canon and Criterion* in the Fall 2001 issue of *WTJ* was followed by the author's rejoinder.⁶⁵ Abraham is a frequent contributor to *WTJ* and his book was given the 2001 Timothy L. Smith and Mildred Bangs Wynkoop Book Award from the Wesleyan Theological Society. Abraham's book is the ultimate assertion that authority rests in the Bible's soteriological function and not in its factual truthfulness. He contends that the Bible is a "means of grace" but not an "epistemic norm"—a means of salvation but not a determiner of truth. He argues that although the church, subsequent to the Fathers, has consistently used the Bible as a determiner of truth, it has been wrong to do so. Thus, by his own admission the position he advocates is a deviation not only from the Protestant but the Catholic tradition.

Others have offered extensive critique of Abraham's arguments and philosophical presuppositions.⁶⁶ It will be sufficient here to point out that the evidence he gives in support of his contention that the Church Fathers did not use the Bible as a determiner of truth proves the exact opposite.⁶⁷ We, however, would make two observations. First, it is

⁶⁴Phillips, "Reading Theory and Biblical Interpretation," 47.

⁶⁵ S. J. Grenz, "Deconstructing Epistemological Certainty in Theology: An Engagement With William J. Abraham's *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*," *WTJ* 36/2 (Fall 2001) 37-45. W. Abraham, "A Response to Stanley Grenz," *WTJ* 36/2 (Fall 2001) 45-49.

⁶⁶ See reviews of Abraham by Roger T. Beckwith (*Anvil*, 17/3 2000, p 224-225); Gerald L. Bray (*Christian Scholar's Review*, 29/1 1999, 205-207); Craig A. Blaising (*Churchman* 115/2 2001, 103-109); Jerry L. Walls (*Theology Today*, 56/4 2000, p 616-17); and John B. Webster (*Scottish Journal of Theology*, 54/2 2001, 221-237).

⁶⁷In his response to Stanley Grenz's evaluation, Abraham admits that this interpretation of the Fathers is "crucial to the story" he tells and yet that it "requires much more work" ("A Response," 46). Indeed, Abraham himself cites abundant evidence of the Fathers' epistemic use of Scripture: "Likewise, in the case of the appeal to Scripture many Church Fathers used Scripture epistemically. They appealed to Scripture proof-texts to support their proposals; they made explicit statements about the normative role of Scripture in their theological deliberations; and they attempted to provide criteria of canonicity which would enable them to demarcate canonical from non-canonical texts." Then, however, he makes statements such as the following: "However, it would be exaggerated to claim that all these together add up to the assertion that the church as a whole canonized an epistemic conception" (W. J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998] 140), or, on page 141, "Yet these kinds of proposals [the truthfulness of divine revelation, the reliability of inspiration,

no surprise that the WTS/*WTJ* would commend this book. As we have seen, since Bassett (1978) articles in *WTJ* have separated the saving function of Scripture from its truthful content. Abraham's book is the ultimate statement of such bifurcation. Ironically, however, it is also an admission that Bassett was wrong: Wesley and his followers did not sunder function from truth content. Abraham castigates the whole post-Patristic Christian tradition including Wesley for joining the two. Thus, it should be no surprise when he says in his 2005 article, "The End of Wesleyan Theology": "Wesley at his core was a staunch Protestant biblicist. Drawing on a medieval vision of divine revelation, he was convinced that all proper theology had to be grounded in Scripture. . . . the ultimate test of truth in theology for Wesley was Scripture."⁶⁸ In footnote 34 he adds, "Wesley even sought to ground his epistemological proposals on Scripture." Thus, by Abraham's own admission, the members of the Wesleyan Theological Society have been wrong for almost three decades in their contention that Wesley was interested in the saving function of Scripture rather than its truthful accuracy. Wesley agreed with the general Christian consensus that denial of the Bible's veracity would invalidate its saving message.

Inerrancy Renewed A Prospect for the Future

Thus, it is not imposition of inerrancy on earlier Wesleyans that is an anachronism. It is, rather, the imposition of a dichotomy between the factual or referential truthfulness of the Scripture and its saving function that misconstrues the thought of Wesley and his followers. Such a position has more in common with classical liberal, existential, ideological, and pragmatic approaches to Scripture, all of which attempt to find some continuing function for Scripture while denying its truthfulness.

However, this is no plea for a return to the 1940's or 50's. The doctrine of inerrancy as classically stated was not without its difficulties.⁶⁹ The oft-repeated accusation that inerrantists described the Bible as if it were a book of propositions has validity. Inerrantists, however, have been struggling with these issues over the last several decades. There are now resources for articulating a richer and more accurate view of Scripture without abandoning what inerrantists held dear. Space prevents giving more than a few suggestions.

First, the use of speech-act theory in Biblical interpretation by such scholars as Kevin Vanhoozer has helped us to grasp the Biblical synthesis between the truthfulness of Scripture and its saving function by reminding us that Scripture is interpersonal communication.⁷⁰ The purpose of Scripture is neither the revelation of some speculative

etc.] remained undeveloped, and it is fair to say that they were never canonized by the church?" Abraham appears to be trying to cover the fatal flaw in his proposal with plaster before we can see what is happening. He also ignores the fact that the New Testament affirms the Old Testament as a norm for truth.

⁶⁸ William J. Abraham, "The End of Wesleyan Theology," *WTJ* 40/1 (Spring 2005), 7-25 (18). Earlier in his article he has claimed that every scholar has given us a different Wesley written in the particular scholar's own image. From this quotation, however, it seems that Al Coppedge's "fundamentalist Wesley" should get the nod!

⁶⁹ W. Ralph Thompson, "Facing Objections Raised Against Biblical Inerrancy," *WTJ* 3/1 (Spring 1968) 21-9.

⁷⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is there a Meaning in This text? : the Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Zondervan, 1998).

‘truth’ nor the producing of some detached saving ‘effect’ but the bringing of people into fellowship with the living God. The Bible describes the history of God’s interaction with humanity in order that human beings might come to enjoy that fellowship. In the course of this interaction he reveals the truth about himself necessary for this fellowship to take place. Thus, in the Bible God reveals truth about himself in the way that one person reveals truth to another through the history of their interaction in order that their personal relationship might grow. Therefore, the truthfulness of Scripture, its narrative character, and its ability to bring people into fellowship with God form a united whole. Without such wholeness any saving ‘effect’ of Scripture is reduced to personal or communal subjectivity or delusion.

The mark of a developing interpersonal relationship is a growing, and thus a changing, understanding of the other. Thus, the approach to Scripture here advocated leaves room for progress in Biblical interpretation without succumbing to subjectivity. Growth in the knowledge of God leads to a more accurate and deeper understanding of Scripture, which, in turn, leads to greater progress in the knowledge of God. At this point the “hermeneutical spiral” as articulated by Grant R. Osborne is most helpful.⁷¹ While advocating interpretation from a Wesleyan perspective, Joel Green admitted that the interpreter must allow the Biblical text to challenge one’s presuppositions. Osborne goes further. The obedient surrendering of one’s presuppositions for Scripture’s reformulation is the ever-repeated necessity for more accurate and deeper Scriptural understanding. Thus spiritual growth goes hand in hand with deeper Biblical understanding in fulfillment of Jesus’ words that the one who would know God’s will, must do it (John 7:17). In this way an ever-deepening grasp of Scriptural truth is the necessary facilitator of the Bible’s saving function.⁷²

⁷¹ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: a Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 2006.)

⁷² This type of ‘multiple meaning’ in Scripture has never been a deterrent to belief in inerrancy. Note the following quotation from D. L. Moody, *Bible Marking*; “The Bible is one that you can never finish with. It is like a bottomless well; you can always find fresh truth gushing forth from its pages. ‘No Scripture,’ said Spurgeon, ‘is exhausted by a single explanation. The flowers of God’s garden bloom not only double, but sevenfold; they are continually pouring forth fresh fragrance.’ Hence the great fascination of constant and earnest Bible study. I thank God there is a height in the Book that I have never been able to reach, a depth that I have never been able to fathom.” <http://www.gotthebible.com/HTML/markings.html> (September 20, 2008).