

*An Examination of the Claim that
Inerrancy is a Post-Enlightenment Doctrine*

Dan Nehrbass

I. Introduction

It would be irrational to esteem the Bible as inerrant if such an estimation were not the claim of Scripture itself. In fact, if one can prove that neither the Bible, the apostles, nor the church fathers had such a high regard for the Bible as inerrantists today, then the doctrine of inerrancy is effectively invalidated. If the doctrine of inerrancy is a creation of theologians which was unknown before the enlightenment, then the inerrantist is perhaps “of all men most to be pitied” because he would be have put his faith in a book that “never asked” for such faith. At the core of inerrancy is the assumption that the Bible claims such a position. C. S. Lewis said about Jesus, “You cannot call him a good teacher. He did not leave that option open to us. He didn’t intend to.”^[1] Likewise, the inerrantist says, “You cannot call the Bible a good book. It did not leave that option open to us. It did not intend to.”

So many proponents of inerrancy have sought to prove that the Bible and the early church had a regard for Scripture which is equal to that of today’s fundamentalist. They have cited the apostolic fathers and the writings of Augustine, Calvin, and Luther as evidence.

Yet, the claim that inerrancy is a post-enlightenment creation still abounds. My passion for this issue is borne out of my study at a seminary where this claim was assumed by most professors. When a student spoke of inerrancy, it was not uncommon for the professor to say something like, “you’re imposing on Scripture a doctrine which the Bible itself does not claim” or, “you are holding Scripture to a post-enlightenment criterion of veracity.” Seldom was I given any evidence to support the claim that inerrancy is a recent phenomenon, but books defending this position are ubiquitous. These liberal theologians also cite the apostolic fathers and the writings of Augustine, Calvin, and Luther as evidence. The question that must be examined, therefore is, “How do both liberals and conservatives, using the same sources as evidence, arrive at different conclusions?”

This paper will examine the evidence for the claim that inerrancy is a post-enlightenment doctrine. I will scrutinize the grounds for which scholars make this claim, and point out the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments. I will demonstrate how their arguments are at times unfounded, and will thereby uphold the claim that inerrancy was the position held by the early church fathers.

II. History of Research

Work #1: Rogers, Jack B. & Donald McKim. *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.

A. Thesis of *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*

The thesis of Rogers' and McKim's book is well stated in the forward by F. L. Battles. He says the purpose of *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* is to answer the question, "How did the defensive, intransigent position of inerrancy that marks the handling of Scripture among certain twentieth-century children of the Protestant Reformation come into existence?"^[2] The authors state that the doctrine of inerrancy is a relatively recent phenomenon which began during the era of "old Princeton." So revolutionary was the doctrine of inerrancy purported at Princeton, claim the authors, that the so-called Calvinists were no longer followers of Calvin. They explain, "In actuality they [the old Princeton professors] believed and taught a theological method regarding the authority and interpretation of the Bible that was rooted in a post-Reformation scholasticism, an approach almost the exact opposite of Calvin's own."^[3]

In fact, Rogers and McKim argue that throughout history the church has interpreted the Bible with the allowance of historical and scientific error. The denial of such error is more recent. They argue, "certain features of the central church tradition regarding the authority and interpretation of scripture [such as accommodation] which had been retained from the early church down through the reformation, were lost in the post-Reformation reaction to the rise of scientific criticism of the Bible."^[4] Rogers and McKim believe that the historic interpretation of Scripture is founded on the concept of accommodation. They claim that among recent proponents of inerrancy (such as Princeton's Turretin), "There was no trace of the central Christian tradition of accommodation."^[5] In other words, the thesis of McKim's and Rogers' book rests on their claim that accommodation is central to the traditional Christian interpretation of the Bible, and that their definition of accommodation accurately reflects the definition held by historical interpreters, such as the church fathers.

A. Methodology, Argumentation, and Conclusion

In the first half of *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* Rogers and McKim examine the classical roots of biblical interpretation. They cite the works of Clement, Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas to show that the foundation of ancient biblical interpretation allowed for the accommodation. The authors attempt to demonstrate that the ancient writers were willing to admit a much more human origin of the Bible than today's proponents of inerrancy were. While Rogers and McKim admit that many of these writers spoke of the Bible as errorless, they claim that the ancients had a different concept of error than the modern reader. While to the post-enlightenment reader error may denote anachronism, confused chronology, and mistaken geography, the ancient writers were concerned only with the Bible's theological message. Therefore when Clement said that the Bible was without error, he did not mean that it was inerrant in the modern sense. Instead, he meant that Bible's theological claims were correct, even if it had other historical, scientific, or geographical errors.

The authors also study the works of Reformation writers such as Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, and Calvin. Similar to the argument of ancient writers, Rogers and McKim claim that though the reformers had a high view of Scripture, their main concern was on the saving function of the Bible, not on its form. In other words, when the reformers spoke of the Bible's infallibility, they were speaking of its ability to save, but they did not have in mind the Bible's freedom from scientific, geographical, or historical error.

It was during the enlightenment, say Rogers and McKim, that some theologians began to interpret the Bible in a radically different light. Due to the great changes in science and philosophy after the reformation there arose an era of "reformed scholasticism." Since people began to look at science and philosophy differently, it was only natural that they would look at Scripture differently. Enlightenment theologians changed the concept of "biblical freedom from error" to include the necessity of "biblical truth in science, history, and geography." The authors cite the works of Melanchthon, Martyr, Beza, Copernicus, Descartes, and Turretin as evidence that a new school of interpretation was emerging.

British writers who paid great attention to the form of Scripture, rather than the function enhanced this new school of interpretation. In other words, they sought to prove that every word of the Bible was without error, and not just every theological concept. While this supposedly new form of interpretation gained great strength (even into the present century), Rogers and McKim state that there was a "recovery of alternatives in the reformation tradition." By this they mean that throughout the following centuries many writers held that in order for the Bible to be perfect in its saving function, it was not necessary for it to be perfect in form. The

authors use the writings of Warfield as a classic example of an argument for the inerrant form of Scripture, while they credit Barth for a recovery of the reformed tradition of emphasis on function.

C. Analysis of Strengths

Perhaps the greatest strength in *The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture* is the authors' engagement with primary sources. If one is looking to find the ancient writers' view of Scripture, this book is an excellent collection. The authors have provided many of the most relevant excerpts, and nothing which is irrelevant. While a reading of the primary sources is necessary to understand the interpretation and context of their words, Rogers and McKim tell the reader where to go to evaluate their conclusions. It is a bold step for the authors, for most of the passages they used as evidence from the ancient writers seem incriminating to their thesis at face value. While many writers may be tempted to neglect these potentially damaging pieces of evidence, the authors use them as support.

The authors are forthright about the problem which they are addressing. They hold what they consider a "high view of Scripture," but contend that such a view does not necessarily require one to say that it is inerrant in all that it says. They say, "As we have seen, however, people can agree on the inspiration and authority of the Bible, yet have decisive differences regarding the nature and purpose of the Bible and the manner in which it is to be interpreted."^[6]

Rogers and McKim are also willing to admit that throughout history theologians have had a very high view of Scripture. For instance, they state that Wycliffe argued for the "sufficiency of Holy Scripture as understood by the father and doctors of the church."^[7] Regarding Luther, they admit, "What made [his] speech at Worms revolutionary was not that he affirmed the authority of Scripture. It was rather that he denied the authority of popes and councils as the exclusive interpreters of the Bible."^[8] In this statement Rogers and McKim are admitting that Luther affirmed the authority of Scripture. While they will go on to show that Luther did not believe in inerrancy (as presently defined), they do not exaggerate their point or claim that the reformers or ancients did not believe in the authority of Scripture.

They also admit that the form (words), and not just the function of Scripture was important to some expositors. They say, "To this end, [Wycliffe] interpreted the Bible both in its grammatical-historical and its allegorical senses. However, Wycliffe had no use for those who subverted the message of Scripture by

fanciful allegories."^[9]

Another great contribution of *The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture* is the discussion of Contextualism versus Literalism. Rogers and McKim relate Calvin's words; "There are many statements in Scripture the meaning of which depends upon their context."^[10] Certainly some ancient writers, reformers, and even modern writers fail to look at the context of Scripture. Rogers and McKim point out the importance of reading Scripture within its context; an admonition with which many inerrantists will agree.

D. Analysis of Weaknesses

The authors say of Clement of Alexandria, "The Bible itself was accepted on faith, it did not need to be proved to be authentic."^[11] A light reading of Clement will affirm that he assumed the authority of Scripture, and therefore did not set out to prove that it was inerrant. Rogers and McKim believe that this fact supports their thesis that the Bible should not be scrutinized scientifically or historically (because Clement did not scrutinize Scripture), but such a conclusion does not necessarily follow. One could argue that Clement did not need to provide proofs because he did not sense that his audience required them. It is impossible to say whether Clement would have used proofs if he were writing to a more skeptical audience. His assumption of the veracity of Scripture may imply that his audience also held the same assumption. Rogers and McKim, however, are taking Clement's words a step further and saying that Clement did not believe a proof of the Bible was necessary because (they claim) he did not believe the Bible was intended for this type of interpretation.

Rogers and McKim make unfounded assumptions about Clement's use of the word "accommodation." Clement said, "the Lord accommodated himself to human weakness for our salvation."^[12] One may grant that Clement believed God had to use the limits of human speech, writing, and language in order to communicate, but Rogers and McKim use this statement to argue, "God did not impose a divine literature on human beings. God did not require persons to have knowledge of the universe beyond their contemporaries. God was not concerned with inculcating a perfect philosophy or perfect physics."^[13] None of these statements regarding God's intentions can be deduced from Clement's use of the term "accommodation." Clement's admission that God used human weakness does not imply error in the text, nor does it rule out the

possibility that God intended Scripture for philosophy, physics, geography, or science.

The authors cite Origen who said, "The sacred works are not the works of men."^[14] But regarding this statement they explain, "The background of such statements was Origen's conviction that the basic purpose of Scripture was to bring persons to salvation...it was the saving message, not the form of the words, that was wholly from God."^[15] It is impossible, however, for Rogers and McKim to make such a definitive claim about Origen's intent. Furthermore, the authors do not demonstrate that any distinction between message and form actually exists or can be delineated. One could argue that message and form (words) are so enmeshed that no meaningful distinction can be made. An examination of the difference between "form" and "function" of words is outside the scope of this book, but the authors do not even acknowledge that a distinction between the two is doubtful and problematic.

Rogers and McKim claim, "[Origen] rejected any idea of mechanical mode of inspiration. He acknowledged that the New Testament evangelists and Paul expressed their own opinions, and that they could have erred."^[16] The authors give no support to the claim that Origen rejected mechanical inspiration. They do, however, cite *In Johann, tome 1* to substantiate the claim that Origen believed the biblical authors expressed their own opinions and that they could have erred. The passage they use for evidence does indeed support that Origen believed Paul at times expressed his own opinion. Paul even admits this in his letters. But the leap from "opinion" to "error" is not found in Origen, and neither does it necessarily follow that Paul's opinion constitutes an error.

Regarding Origen's concept of accommodation Rogers and McKim say, "God graciously condescended to communicate in human terms so that human beings might 'attain a clear knowledge of him.' The Bible was a book of salvation, not human science."^[17] Elsewhere they say, "Augustine warned Christians not to take their 'science' from the Bible." It is unclear what the authors are attempting to prove by these statements. Few, if any, proponents of inerrancy would claim that the Bible is a book of human science. Even if one admits that the Bible's primary focus is salvation, not science, it does not follow that the Bible is incorrect about any scientific claims it may contain.

The authors say of Origen that, "Occasionally he declared that the literal sense of a passage was not true at all and that the text had to be taken as completely spiritual."^[18] Again, it is unclear what Rogers and McKim

are attempting to refute or prove. Few, if any, proponents of inerrancy would say that the literal sense of every passage in the Bible is the correct interpretation. The authors have substituted the doctrine of inerrancy with a hermeneutic that is strictly literal. The connection between a literal interpretation and inerrancy is not, however, so great that Origen's hermeneutic is incompatible with inerrancy.

An honest, open reading of the early church fathers will reveal that they assumed the complete reliability of Scripture. This fact is evident even in the few excerpts from the church fathers that Rogers and McKim use to support their thesis. They admit that John Chrysostom said, "He who is a Christian, agrees with the Holy Scripture, and he who does not agree with it, has deviated from the true faith."^[19] The authors quote Augustine who said, "All that is in these Scriptures, believe me, is profound and divine."^[20] Rogers and McKim have the burden of proof to demonstrate that the abundance of affirmations regarding the truth of scripture only refer to spiritual matters, and not to historical or scientific matters. Neither Augustine, nor Origen, nor Clement distinguish between spiritual or historical matters. The distinction is one that McKim and Rogers have created, and perhaps such a distinction is not even possible. For instance, we read that Gideon routed an army of 15,000 men with his small company of 300 men. Rogers and McKim would argue that this story was true in its spiritual meaning, but not necessarily in its historical meaning. The spiritual meaning, however, is inextricably bound to the historical meaning. The spiritual meaning (which Rogers and McKim believe) is that God is able to defeat 15,000 men with 300 men. If the event did not occur in history, then the spiritual proposition is meaningless. If Gideon really had 12,000 men (and not 300) then the spiritual proposition is also meaningless. Rogers and McKim are basing their argument on a distinction between the historical and the spiritual, and they do not even admit that this distinction is doubtful and problematic.

Rogers and McKim state that, "The activity of the Holy Spirit governed the outcome, but not the methods of the biblical writers, according to Augustine."^[21] They base this claim on Augustine's words: "If anyone should claim that the power of the Holy Spirit ought to have helped the evangelists not to differ in their choice of words, the ordering of the words, or the numbers of their words, then he simply does not understand that this procedure of the evangelist was quite necessary if they were to persuade other men of their veracity."^[22] But Augustine is not saying God did not help the evangelists in their word choice. Instead, he is saying that it was necessary for God to allow the evangelists a differing word choice. Augustine may have believed that God prompted the evangelists to use different words. Nearly every proponent of inerrancy would agree with

Augustine that the Holy Spirit allowed for (or even prompted) four slightly different gospels. In fact, the purpose of Augustine's statement (which McKim and Rogers use to show he did not believe in inerrancy) is to prove that the Bible is without error. Contained in that Augustinian passage are the words, "the truth is no wise violated if the same events are narrated in different ways and with different words."^[23]

Rogers and McKim address an Augustinian passage that they find problematic. Augustine said, "I have learned to yield this respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture; of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error."^[24] The authors claim, however, that "Error, for Augustine, had to do with deliberate and deceitful telling of that which that author knew to be untrue. He did not apply the concept of error to problems that arose from the human limitations of knowledge, various perspective in reporting events, or historical or cultural conditioning of the writers."^[25] It is true that in the immediate context of this passage Augustine is refuting Jerome's claim that Paul deliberately lied about his confrontation with Peter, but it does not necessarily follow that the only meaning of "error" for Augustine was a deliberate lie. The only valid conclusion from this passage is that Augustine did not believe that the biblical authors lied. Again, the purpose of Augustine's argument is to show the reliability of the Bible, but Rogers and McKim are using his words to show that Augustine believed the opposite.

The authors claim, "Words like 'dictation' and 'error' did not then have the technological overtones they now carry. Augustine did not expect the biblical writers always to give a literal, technical reproduction of events."^[26] Rogers and McKim give no support (either literary or linguistic) for the claim that dictation and error now have different meanings. By comparing language to technology, they hope to present an analogy that will meet with wide acceptance despite the lack of support for their argument.

Rogers and McKim refer to Bernard of Clairvaux as a leader of monastic reform. They say that he reacted to scholasticism (which emphasized reason) and adopted the motto "I believe in order that I might experience."^[27] There is no question that Bernard proposed an experiential epistemology. This does not prove, however, that he did not believe the Bible was without error; only that he did not make it his primary goal to prove that it was inerrant. Bernard had contemporaries who defended the Bible's truth with reason, and he did not argue against them. Instead, he embarked on a different task, to "discover with greater facility through prayer than through disputation."^[28] One could conclude, therefore, that Bernard assumed the truth

of Scripture (in form and function) and did not sense the need to prove his assumption. The authors say of Scholastic theology that, "Reason was given precedence over faith." They say that this unfortunate occurrence was an exaggeration of Augustine's motto, "I believe in order that I might understand." It is obvious, however, that Augustine's endeavor did not, did not give precedence of reason over faith. Faith was a priori; reason was secondary. Once faith was assumed, reason was engaged. Rogers and McKim claim that Augustine gave precedence to reason, when in Augustine's words he first believed, and then sought to understand.

E. Summary: Where More Work is Needed

The bias of the authors' argument is reflected in their assessment of Lindsell who said, "godly men through the ages have come to the Scripture without advanced theological training and have been better interpreters and more spiritual leaders than who have undergone the most rigorous theological training." In response to this claim, Rogers and McKim say, "Lindsell's statement illustrates a pervasive coupling of the rationalistic scholasticism of the old Princeton school with the anti-intellectualism of American fundamentalism."^[29] But this criticism of Lindsell contains a logical contradiction. The authors are criticizing Lindsell for his rational approach to Scripture, yet they also criticize him for his anti-intellectualism. If they are willing to grant that Lindsell's *Battle for the Bible* takes a rational, scholastic approach to Scripture, they should also admit that this approach is fundamentally an intellectual one. There is nothing anti-intellectual about Lindsell's statement. All he is saying is that it is possible for someone without theological training to understand the Bible, and for someone with training not to understand the Bible. The difference in Lindsell's assessment is whether the student has a belief that the Bible is true or not. It appears that McKim and Rogers are deeming anti-intellectual anyone who holds the belief in inerrancy, without giving the doctrine a fair trial.

Rogers and McKim criticize evangelicals for taking a scientific approach toward Scripture: an approach that they say was neither intended by the biblical authors, nor is it an historical approach. But one must ask, "By what criteria do people reject the doctrine of inerrancy?" In order for one to reject the notion that the Bible is free from historical, scientific, and theological error, one would have to prove that such errors exist. So it appears that Rogers and McKim, by accepting a doctrine of fallibility, are doing so on the same grounds that they reject the doctrine of inerrancy. They reject inerrancy because of its scientific/scholastic foundation, and they accept fallibility (perhaps implicitly) because they can *prove* that the Bible has errors.

The authors seldom admit that their conclusions are debatable. They rarely draw attention to the fact that numerous books have argued for a very different approach to interpretation of Scripture. The value and integrity of this book would be greatly enhanced if the authors acknowledged and engaged with scholars on the "other side." Instead of presenting an historical approach to interpretation which stands alone, an interaction between scholars who interpret history differently is needed. In addition, the thesis of *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* ultimately rests on the claim that there is a difference between form and function. In other words, they claim that it is possible for the Bible to be free from functional error, but not from error in form. The authors assume that a clear difference can be delineated, but such a distinction is doubtful. The integrity of their argument would be enhanced if they admitted to such a difficulty, and the strength of their argument would be enhanced if they could demonstrate that such a distinction could exist. In short, the authors need to prove that it is possible for the Bible to communicate concepts that are always true without using words that are always true. Yet, concepts are drawn from words: there is a direct connection between the two. The claim that the Bible is true in concept (function) but not word (form) seems illogical, and therefore the authors have the burden to show that it is not.

Work #2: Woodbridge, John D. *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1982.

A. Thesis of *Biblical Authority*

Woodbridge is convinced that Rogers and McKim have not adequately represented the orthodox view of Scripture in their book *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*. His book is a response to their thesis that the Apostolic fathers, Luther, Calvin, and later reformers did not believe in inerrancy. While he admits that, "evangelicals have not been sufficiently judicious in their claims about the central teaching of the church"^[30] Woodbridge believes that an honest reading of the ancient and Reformation writers will reflect the doctrine of inerrancy. He states that Rogers and McKim, "want their readers to join them in affirming what they believe to be orthodox reformed teaching concerning biblical authority."^[31]

Woodbridge asks the question, "Who is to represent the central teachings of the church?" Most scholars agree that the view of the Apostolic fathers and the Reformers is vital to the discussion. But of

course, there is still the question of which of the Apostolic fathers represent orthodoxy.^[32] Woodbridge is less concerned with representing orthodoxy, however; he is more concerned with showing that there were at least some prominent figures who adhered to inerrancy before the enlightenment.

B. Methodology, Argumentation, and Conclusion

Woodbridge first summarizes the thesis proposed by Rogers and McKim in *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*. He then explains the methodology of these writers. Next he examines their arguments regarding the Apostolic fathers, Calvin, and Luther while demonstrating that these writers believed in inerrancy.

Central to Woodbridge's thesis is the definition of error. To Rogers and McKim, error means that the biblical authors entered into "purposeful or intentional deceit."^[33] On the other hand, to Woodbridge error means any scientific, historical, geographical, or theological untruth. Woodbridge's definition reflects the doctrine of inerrancy. He points out that Roger's and McKim's definition of error is largely based on Augustine's letter to Jerome where the writer urged his brother not to think the biblical authors ever committed intentional deceit. But as Woodbridge explains, just because "error" in this instance is "intentional deceit," it does not follow that this definition reflects the use of the word throughout Augustine's or other Apostolic fathers' writings.

The author seeks to show that Rogers and McKim are in the minority, not only of historical scholarship, but also even of modern, liberal scholarship. Even Bruce Vawter (a liberal writer esteemed by Rogers and McKim) agrees that Origen believed in inerrancy. Similarly, Woodbridge shows that F. C. Baur stated that Chrysostom believed in inerrancy. In fact, according to Baur, Chrysostom said that every name, indeed every syllable, iota, and dash was given by divine inspiration. To say that inerrancy is a new doctrine not only contradicts the evidence, but also contradicts what even liberal scholars acknowledge.^[34]

Woodbridge exposes several "historical disjunctions" committed by Rogers and McKim. For instance, these authors state that the Apostolic fathers agree that the primary purpose of Scripture is to lead one to salvation. They assume that this means the church fathers did not view the Bible as inerrant with respect to history, but Woodbridge states that this conclusion does not follow.^[35] Rogers and McKim also state that because Scripture uses phenomenological language the biblical authors were not concerned with minor

details.^[36] This, too, is a conclusion which does not necessarily follow.

Not only are there several disjunctions in Rogers' and McKim's thesis, says Woodbridge, but there are also several misrepresentations and eliminations of evidence. Woodbridge claims that the prima facie readings of the Apostolic fathers, Luther, and Calvin, leads one to believe that they were inerrantists. He concludes that the natural interpretation of these writings supports the thesis that inerrancy has always been a doctrine of the church.

C. Analysis of Strengths

Woodbridge puts forth a convincing argument that Rogers and McKim give slanted and faulty reinterpretations of the ancient writers. They neglect passages from ancient writers which don't support their thesis, and other ancient writers they neglect completely. Of primary relevance are the writings of Clement of Rome, Iranaeus, Theophilus of Antioch, and Justin Martyr. One must wonder why Rogers and McKim make no mention of these ancient authorities. Woodbridge supplies his own explanation: "they ignore the Roman, legal, Western writers"^[37] because these church fathers do not corroborate their thesis. For instance, Clement of Rome said, "You have searched the Scriptures, which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit; you know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them."^[38] Justin Martyr said that, "If you have imagined you could throw doubt on the passage, in order that I might say the Scriptures contradicted each other, you have erred. If a Scripture which appears to be of such a kind that it is contrary, since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another, I shall admit rather that I do not understand what is recorded."^[39]

Iranaeus said that if Luke made any mistakes, then "men must receive the rest of his narrative or else reject these parts also. For no person of common sense can permit them to receive some things recounted by Luke as being true, and to set others aside."^[40] It is clear why critics of inerrancy do not refer to this comment by Iranaeus: they have done exactly what the church father said no one with common sense would do. They claim to believe that the Bible is true with respect to salvation, but that it contains errors in other areas. Iranaeus realized that this was an illogical position: it requires one to make the impossible distinction between which sections of the Bible are inerrant, and which are not. At first the distinction may not seem so

difficult: theological propositions are inerrant, but historical narratives are not. But the line becomes less distinguishable with respect to theological narratives which depend on historical reliability (for instance, the Resurrection). Prophecy even further blends theological propositions with historical ones. One cannot say that the prophecies of Revelation, for instance, are inerrant with respect to the theology they set forth, but we cannot be sure whether they will come to pass. The theology of these prophecies depends on the dependability of them. Iranaeus was correct that one cannot “pick and choose.” Based on these key writings from ancient authorities which Rogers and McKim ignore, it is clear that inerrancy was the view of some church fathers, as Woodbridge suggests.

Woodbridge also raises a strong refutation of Rogers’ and McKim’s treatment of accommodation. He states that it does not follow that God’s revelation must contain errors, simply because he used humans to communicate that truth.^[41] Woodbridge is right, for accommodation is necessary because of our weakness, not God’s. God had to speak to us in human form because of our deficiencies, not His. It would therefore be illogical to say that God’s communication contains errors on the basis of his accommodation. There is nothing in the doctrine of accommodation that precludes one from saying that because of our weakness God gave a perfect revelation in the only way that we can understand.

D. Analysis of Weaknesses

Woodbridge assumes that Augustine believed in total inerrancy. He quotes the church father: “it seems to me that the most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books.... or if you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement, as made in the way of duty, there will not be left a single sentence of these books which, if appearing to any one difficult in practice or hard to believe may not by the same fatal rule be explained away.”^[42] From this excerpt Woodbridge argues that Augustine believed in inerrancy. But Rogers and McKim have a case that based on this quotation Augustine viewed error as intentional deceit. After all, Augustine speaks of error in the sense of duty twice in this passage. Woodbridge does not address this problem, and at first glance Rogers and McKim seem correct. Instead of addressing Augustine’s use of the word “duty” he cites Polman who said that, “Augustine thought it inconceivable that the Holy Spirit, the real author of Holy Scripture should have contradicted Himself.” In this case citing a secondary source (albeit a liberal one) is insufficient. The strength of Woodbridge’s thesis is weakened by his neglect of this issue.

E. Summary: Where more work is needed

On several occasions Woodbridge addresses the question of whether the ancient writers thought the Bible was without scientific error. He, as well as Rogers and McKim, refer to a pre-critical, pre-scientific era, and a modern scientific age. Woodbridge believes that the ancient writers did view the Bible as free from scientific error, but he still seems willing to speak of a pre-scientific age. It seems over simplistic, however, to speak of such a dichotomy between ancient and modern science. Rogers' and McKim's thesis depends on an age where people were unconcerned with exact science: if they were unconcerned, then they would allow scientific error and still say that the Bible was without error. Woodbridge certainly denies that ancients were unconcerned, but he does not sufficiently demonstrate that a distinction between the pre-scientific and the modern scientific age is impossible. The thesis that the ancient writers believed in inerrancy with respect to science would be well served if one could show that there have always been elements of critical history, critical geography, and critical science: even in antiquity.

Work #3: Preus, Robert D. "The View of the Bible held by the Church: The early church through Luther." *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy: Submit Papers*, ed. Norman Geisler. Oakland [CA]: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978.

A. Thesis of "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The early church through Luther"

Robert Preus argues that the doctrine of inerrancy is the orthodox view of the Bible. His thesis is that the Apostolic fathers and Luther believed in the complete authority and reliability of Scripture in all respects.

B. Methodology, Argumentation, and Conclusion

Preus first examines the statements of the Apostolic fathers regarding Scripture. He cites Aquinas: "It was necessary for man's salvation that there be certain doctrine according to divine revelation, truths which exceed human reason. Even regarding those truths which human reason can investigate it was necessary that man be taught by divine revelation.^[43] In other words, Aquinas saw the inerrancy of Scripture as a necessity for our salvation. Preus also quotes Augustine: "Only to those books which are called canonical have I learned to give honor so that I believe most firmly that no author in these books made any error in writing... I

read other authors not with the thought that what they have taught and written is true just because they have manifested holiness and learning. ^[44]

Next Preus looks at the writings of Luther to demonstrate that he also believed in inerrancy. He quotes Luther: "Natural reason produces heresy and error. Faith teaches and adheres to the pure truth. He who adheres to the Scriptures will find this." Luther goes on, "A fool, he so mixes up things, and uses wild, queer words, and statements. But it is our fault, who have not understood the language nor known the matter of the prophets." ^[45] Clearly Luther was concerned about upholding the words, and not just the concepts of Scripture. When Luther encountered an apparent error, he assumed that the fault was his lack of understanding, not Scripture's lack of perfection. So convinced was Luther that the every word in the Bible was inspired that he said, "Whoever is so bold that he venture to accuse God of fraud and deception in a single word and does so willfully again and again after he was been warned and instructed once or twice will likewise certainly venture to accuse God of fraud and deception in all of his words. Therefore it is true, absolutely and without exception, that everything is believed or nothing is believed." ^[46] Anyone who claims that Luther upheld the function of Scripture, but not the form, must either manipulate or ignore that the Reformer regarded critics of a single word as blasphemers. Luther said, "Whoever belies and blasphemes God in one word, or speaks as if it were a trifling thing, he blasphemes God in everything, and regards all blasphemy of God unimportant." ^[47]

C. Analysis of Strengths

Preus gives an overwhelming amount of evidence that the Apostolic fathers and Luther believed in inerrancy. The only recourse for an opponent to his view would be to say that the prima facia reading of these quotes is insufficient: Preus has misinterpreted them. The majority of his evidence involves Luther's view of Scripture. Preus raises strong objections to the claim that Luther only viewed the Bible as inerrant as it pertains to salvation. He states, "The divine origin, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture all hang together for Luther. Each concept entails the other... as he debates his case for the *sola scriptura* against Romanists or enthusiasts he maintains that the Holy Sprit caused the biblical writers to write clearly, truthfully, and without equivocation. The notion of an authoritative, *errant* Word of God would for Luther have been utter nonsense. No such idea could have been entertained prior to the rise of subjective idealism and

existentialism."^[48] And indeed no such idea was raised prior to this century. One would have a difficult, if not impossible task to show how Luther's believed in scriptural error. Surely, given the vast amount of statements where Luther upholds "the Scriptures have never erred,"^[49] the burden of proof lay in the hands of those who deny the Reformer believed in inerrancy. No statement of Luther has ever been put forth to show that he believed the Bible was ever in error.

D. Analysis of Weaknesses

If there is a weakness in Preus' article it is that he assumes the reader will take the statements by the Apostolic fathers and Luther at face value. He assumes that the statements speak for themselves. The self-evident interpretation may be obvious to conservatives and scholars before the twentieth century. But Rogers and McKim have gained a substantial hearing with their claim that Luther's text-critical methods prove he believed some books of the Bible contained error. Furthermore, critics have claimed that when Luther spoke of error he only meant with respect to salvation. Preus' evidence would be better served if he addressed these two criticisms.

E. Summary: Where more work is needed

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the impact of Preus' claim that the Apostolic fathers and Luther adhered to inerrancy would be heightened if he could demonstrate that he has interpreted the excerpts correctly. Most of Preus' citations of ancient and reformation writers are brief, and he seldom gives the context. He could be charge with "proof-texting." Finally, he assumes that the reader will agree with his interpretation of these excerpts, but obviously some writers (such as Rogers and McKim) do not agree with his interpretation. A dialectic between these two schools of interpretation is needed.

Work #4: Gerstner, John H. "The View of the Bible held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines." *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy: Submit Papers*, ed. Norman Geisler. Oakland [CA]: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978.

A. Thesis of "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines"

The purpose of Gerstner's article, as the title suggests, is to represent Calvin and the Westminster

Divine's view of the Bible. The author's thesis is similar to Woodbridge's thesis in *Biblical Authority*.

Gerstner states that, "there is a general tendency in church history for those who deviate from orthodoxy to try to prove their deviation is, in reality, an exercise in repositioning and reformation."^[50] Contrary to the thesis of Rogers and McKim, he argues that the orthodox view of Scripture is that of inerrancy. Only recently, according to Gerstner, have people denied this. He claims, "the traditional Christian view is that the Bible is 'all true.' What 'fundamentalism' has reacted to is a deviation from the historic norm."^[51]

B. Methodology, Argumentation, and Conclusion

Gerstner exposes five non-sequiturs of the view held by Rogers and McKim (that inerrancy is a post enlightenment doctrine). The first he calls phenomenal non sequitur. According to Gerstner, liberals have misrepresented the view of inerrancy to say that the doctrine requires the Bible to explain accurately the way things are. Yet, Gerstner clarifies, the Bible accurately explains the way things appear. It does not necessarily follow, however, that if the Bible speaks of how things appear it must also explain how things actually are in every circumstance (he uses the age-old example of "sunrise")^[52]. Liberals criticize proponents of inerrancy for holding the Bible to a standard of scientific rigor which was unheard of by the ancients. Yet, as Gerstner points out, inerrantists do not require that the Bible always makes the connection between the way things appear and the way they are explained by science.

The second non sequitur is that of accommodation. Gerstner explains that it does not necessarily follow that if God used human language to communicate then his communication must be errant.

Third, the author speaks of emphasis non sequitur. By this he means that even if we grant the church fathers believed the central emphasis of Scripture was salvation (and not science or history), it does not necessarily follow that the Bible must make errors in statements that do not pertain to salvation.

Forth, Gerstner speaks of critical non sequitur. He argues that it does not follow that the apostolic fathers or Luther believed the Bible could contain errors just because they doubted the canonicity of certain books.

And fifth, the author speaks of docetist non sequitur. He is referring to the claim made by critics who say that humans wrote the Bible, so it must contain error, because humans are bound to err. But Gerstner argues, "'To err is human' may be descriptive of the fact that men do err and that error is characteristic of men

rather than God. But it does not follow that men always err, even apart from inspiration. Certainly it does not follow that if God inspired men, he would be incapable of keeping the free of human error in writing."^[53]

Next Gerstner examines several statements by Calvin which demonstrate that the Reformer believed in inerrancy. Calvin said of Scripture that it is, "The sure and infallible record; the inerring standard; the pure Word of God; the infallible rule of his holy truth; free from every stain or defect; the inerring certainty, the certain and unerring rule; the unerring light; and the infallible word of God." Calvin said that the Bible, "has nothing belonging to man mixed with it, it is inviolable, and contains infallible oracles."^[54] Based on these statements, Calvin's view of Scripture can only be identified as that of verbal plenary inspiration, or inerrancy.

Finally, the author cites the work of two unlikely sources. One would expect that Barth and Brunner would be of little help to a proponent of inerrancy, and that the views of these neo-orthodox writers would be closer to those of Rogers and McKim. But Gerstner shows that both Barth and Brunner believed that Calvin held to the doctrine of inerrancy.

C. Analysis of Strengths

One of Gerstner's greatest strengths in his article involves his treatment of accommodation. Rogers and McKim claim that the ancients believed in biblical error because they spoke of God's accommodation to humans through Scripture. Gerstner states, "The Bible's representing God as accommodating himself to human language has occasioned the logical leap that his word contains error, because accommodation to human language involves accommodation to human error." He goes on to argue, "It does not follow that because God accommodated himself to human language he must accommodate himself to human error. This would only follow by logical necessity if it were first proven that all human language could only err. This would not even be theoretically possible to prove, for it would require human language to prove that human language always errs and the conclusion itself would have to be errant."^[55]

Jesus said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." A strength of Gerstner's article is that he divides the "house" of critics of inerrancy. Neither Barth, Brunner, Rogers, nor McKim subscribe to inerrancy. But Gerstner cites Barth and Brunner to refute Rogers and McKim. The author quotes Barth: "The Reformers took over unquestionably and unreservedly the statement on the inspiration, and indeed the verbal inspiration of the Bible."^[56] And later he cites Brunner: "Calvin's doctrine of the Bible is entirely the

traditional, formally authoritative view. The belief God is the author precedes all doctrine. That again is the old view."^[57] Rogers and McKim are in the minority not only of biblical scholarship, but of modern liberal scholarship as well.

Gerstner makes a formidable argument that Calvin believed in inerrancy. He quotes Calvin, "The full authority which they obtain with the faithful proceeds from no other consideration that that they were persuaded that they proceeded from heaven as if God had been heard giving utterance to them."^[58] The prima facie reading of this quote by Calvin indicates that he believed in plenary verbal inspiration (inerrancy). To say otherwise (that Calvin only meant the Bible was inspired as it relates to salvation, or that Calvin believed in accommodation) as evidence that he did not believe in inerrancy would require adherence to one of Gerstner's non-sequiturs.

He also gives ample evidence that Calvin was concerned about the whole inerrancy of Scripture, and not only matters relating to salvation. Jack Rogers claimed that, "Calvin was acknowledging scientific error in Moses and was indifferent to it."^[59] But Gerstner argues that, "if this were the case, then Calvin would not have said of those who claimed Moses made scientific error "the dishonesty of those men is sufficiently rebuked"^[60] and gone on to show that Moses was not in scientific error."^[61] Clearly, those who criticized the inerrancy of Moses' writings offended Calvin. He sought to uphold every facet of biblical truth.

Overall, his methodology of exposing non-sequiturs is very effective. Rogers and McKim's arguments regarding the historical view of scripture are based on these non-sequiturs. Perhaps the strength of Gerstner's article is a result that his goals are quite attainable. He is not setting out to prove that the church has always believed in inerrancy. Instead, his goal is to demonstrate that the arguments levied by those who say inerrancy is a new doctrine are based on non-sequiturs. If one admits that these five statements regarding the errancy of Scripture do not follow, then one would have difficulty finding any argument against the doctrine of inerrancy.

D. Analysis of Weaknesses

Gerstner's treatment of the *emphasis non sequitur* is perhaps too brief to make an impact or be convincing. He states that, "it does not follow from the Bible's stress on salvation that it may err with impunity in mere historical details."^[62] He does not specifically state what argument he is refuting or who

would support such an argument. One can infer that he is referring to the way liberals would interpret Aquinas' statement that "It was necessary for man's salvation that there be certain doctrine according to divine revelation."^[63] Critics could also refer to Luther's emphasis of the cross, or even 2 Timothy 3:16 which says, "All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness." Each of these statements could be used as proof the neither the Bible nor the historic Church believed in inerrancy, because they thought the central emphasis of Scripture was salvation (and not historical or scientific facts). But, as Gerstner states, it does not follow that just because Augustine, Luther, or the Apostle Paul believed in a central emphasis of Scripture that it must err in other arenas.

E. Summary: Where more work is needed

A vast flood of scholarship has exposed numerous quotations by the Apostolic fathers, Luther, and Calvin to support the claim that these men believed in inerrancy. Gerstner's article contributes to this collection of evidence. Gerstner's non-sequiturs also raise a formidable argument against the Rogers and McKim proposal which denies that inerrancy is an orthodox view. Yet Gerstner provides no specific evidence that any of these non-sequiturs is the basis of anyone's arguments. He seems to assume that the reader knows who/what he is refuting and that the reader will agree that the logic behind his unspoken opponent's argument is faulty. The use of these non sequitur arguments would be greatly enhanced if one could demonstrate the specific ways in which Rogers and McKim, as well as other opponents of inerrancy, violate the rules of logic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the claim that inerrancy is a post-enlightenment creation is irrational on several grounds. First, many critics accuse inerrantists for taking a scientific approach toward the Bible, but in order to prove that the Bible contains errors they must also take a scientific approach toward Scripture.

Second, critics accuse inerrantists for taking a scientific approach, but they also accuse them of being anti-intellectual because of their belief in Scripture.

Third, the natural, historical, and prima-facia reading of the apostolic fathers and Reformers indicates that they believed in inerrancy. To say otherwise requires one to "read between the lines," and interpret the words of these writers in a complex or manipulative way. An example is Rogers' and McKim's conclusion that

Augustine believed error was always intentional lies. Rogers and McKim have also neglected key passages which would discount their position.

Forth, most of the arguments in favor of the position that inerrancy is a post-enlightenment creation depend on several non sequiturs. This is especially true in the critics use of the apostolic fathers understanding of accommodation or emphasis. It does not necessarily follow that the Bible contains scientific errors just because it's primary emphasis is on salvation. And it does not follow that the Bible has errors because it was written by men.

Fifth, critics tend to argue from silence. It appears that the apostolic fathers and Reformers assumed inerrancy, and did not set out to prove it. Critics argue, therefore, that they did not believe in inerrancy because they did not explicitly state so. Even if it were true that the church fathers did not explicitly state their position of the Bible's infallibility (which I have demonstrated is not the case) this is still an argument from silence.

Sixth, the claim that prior to the enlightenment Christians regarded the Bible as infallible in function, but not inform, depends on the possibility of distinguishing between the two. But the meaning of concepts relies on words. Words have a direct relationship to meaning. Therefore, words and meaning cannot be separated, contrary to what opponents of inerrancy suppose.

Seventh, the claim that inerrancy is a post-enlightenment doctrine depends heavily on the assumption that prior to the enlightenment people were unconcerned about scientific, geographic, or linguistic exactness. In other words, the thesis relies on a distinction between a scientific and a pre-scientific world. No evidence has been offered by critics to prove this distinction. It is the opinion of this author that it would be naïve to think that there was ever a time when people were unconcerned about exactness, though the tools of determining scientific details may have been less reliable.

Eighth, it is proper to acknowledge that both critics and proponents of inerrancy base their roots in orthodoxy on an argument from silence. The critic says that because a well-defined doctrine and defense of inerrancy is lacking in the church fathers, they did not believe in the doctrine. Proponents explain this lack of apology or definition as an assumption of the church fathers. The question is, therefore, "Who is more likely to be right?" Is it more likely that the church fathers assumed inerrancy, based on their lack of apology? Or is it more likely that the church fathers did not believe in inerrancy because they did not explicitly state so? Based on the statements of the apostolic fathers and Reformers in this paper, the simplest conclusion seems that it is more likely that they assumed inerrancy.

The claim, therefore, that inerrancy is a post-enlightenment creation is itself a post-modern creation, motivated by the need to place the secular humanist agenda within orthodoxy.

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