

# How to Make a Case for the Inspiration of Scripture in the Current Milieu

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The inspiration and authority of Scripture is a major doctrine of Christianity generally. Evangelicals in particular believe that this doctrine is vital to the *bene esse* (well-being) of the faith. We believe that in the pages of Holy Scripture, God himself has spoken. The Bible is the Word of God. It is, as Paul describes it, *theopneustos* (God-breathed, 2 Tim 3:16), written by men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21) so that what they wrote in the Bible was the very word of God.

This is what we believe about the Bible, but there are many who do not share our belief. And many who do not share this belief seek to challenge it as well. It is because the doctrine of the Bible's inspiration has been, and continues to be, attacked by unbelievers, that this doctrine is a central concern of Christian apologetics. I will not rehearse the many challenges to the divine authority of Scripture here. Those challenges are all too familiar to the readers of this essay. Suffice it to say that the idea that the Bible is God's authoritative, infallible, and inerrant Word is an apologetic issue. That is, the question of whether or not the Bible is God's Word is a question that Christian apologists must seek to answer.

Of course, there are many ways that apologists have sought to deal with this apologetics issue. There are some who believe that the best way to defend the Bible's authority is simply to preach it.<sup>1</sup> The idea is that we need not give rational arguments in defense of biblical

inspiration but should simply preach and teach the Word, which is “living and active” (Heb. 4:12), and the Bible itself—or the Holy Spirit empowering the Bible—will convince the hearers to accept its divine origin and authority. Now I happen to think that God can and does often work this way to convince unbelievers to accept Scripture’s authority (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13). What theologians call the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is, I believe, the real and ultimate reason why anyone comes to believe that the Bible is God’s word. And no doubt the internal testimony of the Spirit occurs on many occasions simply as a result of preaching the Bible. A person hears the word preached, and the Spirit witnesses to his heart and mind so that he is enabled to say, “This is God’s voice that I am hearing.” However, we have no reason to think that the Spirit’s testimony to the authority of Scripture always occurs in this fashion apart from apologetic arguments, and reason to think that it may often function in conjunction with reason and argument (cf. Acts 17:10-11; 18:28, etc.).

Another approach is the presuppositional approach of Cornelius Van Til and his ilk. Similar to the above approach, presuppositionalists tend to disparage rational arguments made in defense of Scripture’s authority. Rather, in apologetics, as in all else, the truth and authority of Scripture must be presupposed. To argue *for* the authority of Scripture is to appeal to an authority (that of human reason) that is superior to that of Scripture which, for the Christian, is not possible. It is not my purpose in this paper to provide a detailed critique of the presuppositional view on the defense of Scripture. Suffice it to say here that I do not agree that a traditional, evidential approach to Scripture places the Christian apologist in the awkward position of trying to justify Scripture by an authority more authoritative than Scripture. What the evidentialist<sup>2</sup> does is simply use his God-given intellect—an indispensable epistemological tool for recognizing truth and distinguishing it from error—in order to *recognize* the authority that the Bible has (and to help others come to recognize it, too).<sup>3</sup>

What I want to do in this article, first, is to survey the various ways that apologists of a more evidential persuasion, who believe that rational arguments in defense of Scripture’s authority are appropriate, have gone about their task. Then I want to develop a version of one of these approaches that I believe makes the strongest possible apology

for that doctrine. I should say at the outset that very little of what I have to say here is original, though I do not believe that anyone has discussed my particular approach to this issue in the systematic way that I intend here.

### *The Inherent Character Approach to Defending Scripture*

As far as I can tell, classical and evidential apologists of recent decades have taken one of two broad approaches to defending the inspiration of Scripture. The first of these I will call the *inherent character approach*. According to this approach, the Bible has certain inherent properties that imply its divine inspiration. Chad Meister's recent text, *Building Belief*,<sup>4</sup> exemplifies this approach well. Meister argues that the Bible is divinely inspired because (1) it contains detailed Messianic prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, and (2) its message has a spiritually and morally transforming affect on many of those who read it.<sup>5</sup> Others who take this same general approach add qualities such as the Bible's unity and its ability to survive attempts in history to eradicate it.<sup>6</sup> In any case, the idea is to draw attention to certain characteristics that the Bible has that would seem best explained by appeal to divine inspiration.

This approach certainly has merit. We might very well expect a divinely inspired book to have such properties. We might expect, for example, that its message be unified and that it have a life-altering affect on readers. However, this approach also has significant weaknesses if it is used as the primary way of arguing for divine inspiration. For one thing, the unity of the Bible's content, as remarkable as it is, does not prove that it is divinely inspired. A book, even a large book written by multiple authors over a long period of time, can have a unified, consistent message and not be divinely inspired. I surmise that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy* also has thematic unity, but we do not believe that Tolkien was divinely inspired. Likewise, the fact that the message of the Bible has a life-transforming affect does not establish the inspiration of the Bible unless we are willing to concede that the Qur'an, The Lotus Sutra, The Book of Mormon, and Marx's

*Communist Manifesto* are all inspired as well. People who read these books report life-changing experiences just as dramatic and positive as those who read the Bible. Again, we would expect that a book inspired by God would have transforming affects on people, but having such affects is not a sufficient condition for divine inspiration.

The matter of fulfilled prophecy is more promising. Accurate and detailed predictive prophecy is tantamount to a miracle, and miracles are a sign of God's intervention into history. The Bible itself testifies to the fact that miracles provide divine attestation to revelation claims (cf. Exod. 4:1-9; Acts 2:22). A prophetic message consistent with our previous knowledge (if any) of God's nature and will, accompanied by bona fide miracles, carries God's imprimatur. Hence, being a kind of miracle, predictive prophecies also carry God's imprimatur.

Nonetheless, I believe that appealing to predictive prophecies to establish the inspiration of Scripture has some shortcomings. One problem is that the Bible is not simply one book, despite its unity. It is a collection of 66 books, written by 40-plus authors. Even if there are no exegetical issues regarding the interpretation of some of the messianic prophecies (as there certainly are), it would seem that these prophecies would *at best* establish the divine inspiration of the books that contain the prophecies. Moreover, the whole approach assumes that the New Testament Gospels that record Jesus' fulfillment of these prophecies are generally reliable, and more specifically, that the texts that report the fulfillments are historically accurate and not fabrications of the early church—points that most skeptics are not willing to grant.<sup>7</sup>

So, though the inherent character approach is helpful in supporting the Christian belief in the authority and inspiration of the Bible, it seems to me that it is worthwhile to consider other, perhaps stronger, alternatives. We will explore such alternatives in the next section.

### *The Christological Approach to Defending Scripture*

The best way to defend the authority of Scripture—where “best” means being able to offer a strong argument that provides a

sufficient condition for inspiration—is, I think, to follow what I call the *Christological approach*. In lectures to my students I refer to this as the “Jesus said so” argument. In other words, we should seek to argue for the inspiration of Scripture by appealing to the authority of Jesus. That is, the argument is that we should believe the Bible is inspired *because Jesus said so*. This argument is not new.<sup>8</sup> I first encountered it early in my apologetic studies when I read works by Norman Geisler and R.C. Sproul. As Geisler presents it, the argument has this structure:<sup>9</sup>

- (1) The New Testament documents are historically reliable.
- (2) These documents accurately present Christ as claiming to be God incarnate and proving it by fulfilled messianic prophecy, by a sinless and miraculous life, and by predicting and accomplishing his resurrection from the dead.
- (3) Whatever Christ (who is God) teaches is true.
- (4) Christ taught that the Old Testament is the written Word of God and promised that his disciples would write the New Testament.
- (5) Therefore, the Bible is the written Word of God.

R.C. Sproul’s argument is worded somewhat differently, but it is essentially the same:<sup>10</sup>

- (1) The Bible is a basically reliable and trustworthy document.
- (2) On the basis of this reliable document we have sufficient evidence to believe confidently that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
- (3) Jesus Christ being the Son of God is an infallible authority.
- (4) Jesus Christ teaches that the Bible is more than generally trustworthy: it is the very Word of God.
- (5) The word, in that it comes from God, is utterly trustworthy because God is utterly trustworthy.
- (6) Therefore, on the basis of the infallible authority of Jesus Christ, the Church believes the Bible to be utterly trustworthy, i.e., infallible [and divinely inspired].

The key premise in both cases is premise (4), the claim that Jesus taught the inspiration of the Bible in both its Old and New Testaments. This premise is, of course, dependent for its force upon the premises preceding, which establish the divine authority of Jesus by way of showing that he is in fact God incarnate. It should be apparent that, if successful, this kind of argument, which appeals directly to the testimony of a personal agent known to carry God's infallible authority, would provide a sufficient condition for the inspiration of the Bible. That is, it provides a direct and powerful deductive argument for the authority and inspiration of Scripture.

In what follows I want to distinguish two versions of this Christological approach and argue that one of them is stronger than the other and ought therefore to be the preferred way of arguing for the Bible's inspiration.

### ***The Historical Reliability Version***

The version of the Christological approach exemplified by both Geisler's and Sproul's arguments (see above)<sup>11</sup> I will call the *Historical Reliability Version* (HRV). I call it that because the first and all important premise makes the claim that the Bible, and specifically the New Testament, is a historically reliable document. That is, the premise asserts that the New Testament is a generally reliable source for historical information about Jesus. This version, then, depends for its success upon establishing that the New Testament is historically reliable. Only on that condition can the argument proceed to appeal to statements in the New Testament concerning Jesus' words and deeds—statements crucial to establishing the truth of premises (2) and (4) (in both arguments) that assert Jesus' resurrection and deity and his teaching concerning the Bible.

Put another way, HRV requires that one provide strong reasons to believe that the New Testament is historically reliable and then, on that premise, requires that one assume that whatever the New Testament says about the words and deeds of Jesus is true. It might be thought that what HRV requires after premise (1) is that one assume that the New Testament is inerrant. But that would not be quite right. All it requires is that the New Testament accounts of Jesus are innocent until proven

guilty, that the critic of the authenticity of any account bears the burden of proof. As Craig Blomberg explains, once one has established that a particular work is historically reliable,

one must immediately recognize an important presupposition that guides most historians in their work. Unless there is good reason for believing otherwise, one will assume that a given detail in the work of a particular historian is factual. This method places the burden of proof squarely on the person who would doubt the reliability of a given portion of the text.<sup>12</sup>

So, HRV does not require the assumption that a historical document is inerrant. Yet, it does require something close to that, namely, the “working hypothesis” that any assertions in the New Testament are to be taken as true *unless and until* they are shown to be false. We might say that HRV requires a kind of provisional, practical inerrancy. Of course, establishing the plausibility of this working hypothesis requires that one do the hard work of showing that the New Testament is historically reliable. Followers of HRV will accomplish this task typically by subjecting the New Testament documents to the three famous tests for historical reliability: the bibliographic, internal, and external tests.<sup>13</sup>

I am highly sympathetic to such arguments for historical reliability. I believe that there is ample evidence to support the conviction that the New Testament Gospels are indeed reliable sources for the historical Jesus. Furthermore, I believe that HRV provides the apologist with a plausible and potentially persuasive argument for the inspiration of the Bible. Certainly, if the apologist is engaging someone who is willing to grant the historical reliability of the New Testament and assume that the text is true unless *proven* false, then the apologist may have a relatively easy time in arguing for the other premises in the argument. Nevertheless, I do not believe that it gives the apologist the best and strongest case for the Bible’s inspiration, at least not in the current academic climate.

First, it must be admitted that, in general, documents that are generally historically reliable usually contain errors even if we cannot readily identify them. No one expects that fallible human authors of

significant historical works will get everything right. Furthermore, the more controversial and extraordinary a claim that an author makes, the more suspicious we are of his accuracy. No matter how reliable and competent in general we think Shelby Foote is in his historical works on the Civil War, if he told us that Lincoln's assassination was staged and that the sixteenth President lived for many more years as a circus clown in Brazil, we would likely reject that claim even if we could not prove it false. This is why Christians and non-Christians alike, as Gary Habermas has argued,<sup>14</sup> dismiss the miracle stories found in the works of Tacitus, Suetonius, and other ancient historians concerning the Roman emperors even though these authors are treated as generally historically reliable. When we run across a miracle-story or some other out-of-the-ordinary claim in a historical document, we tend to be (perhaps *ought* to be) a bit skeptical and may think we have a *prima facie* reason to doubt the story, all things being equal—even if that story occurs in an otherwise reliable document to which we generally give the benefit of the doubt. So, even if someone grants the apologist that the Gospels are historically reliable in general, he may plausibly question the accuracy of the accounts of Jesus' nature miracles or that he claimed to be God, etc., even though he may not be able to show that the story is false.

Secondly, the current academic climate in biblical studies is such that the historical reliability of the Bible is generally rejected. Despite the arguments for reliability put forth by evangelical apologists, it is still the case that many, if not most, biblical scholars believe that the New Testament Gospels are largely fictitious fabrications of the early church. Now if this opinion was simply that of a few ivory-tower academics it would not be that significant to the apologist's task. But the fact is that this attitude toward the New Testament books has widely infected the popular culture in part because the mainstream media has given a platform to scholars like those in the Jesus Seminar, Bart Ehrman, and others. And it does not help matters when novels like Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* concoct conspiracy theories about the origins of the Gospels and pass them off as historical facts. So, good arguments or not, the idea that the New Testament is historically reliable is in serious disfavor culturally.



Of course, one possible response to this cultural trend is to fight the uphill battle and continue defending the historical reliability of the New Testament as the first step in an argument for the Bible's inspiration. The advocate of HRV certainly has that option. Pursuing this option will not alleviate the first concern raised above, however. The problem will remain that general historical reliability alone will not justify credulity toward the Bible's more extraordinary claims. Would it not be a welcome improvement to the Christological approach, then, if it could provide an argument for inspiration that does not require the premise of historical reliability—one that even seeks to give positive evidence for the New Testament's more spectacular claims? This is the promise of the second version of the Christological approach.

### *The Critical Version*

As indicated above, most contemporary New Testament scholars approach the Gospels, fairly or unfairly, with a skeptical eye, treating the portrait of Jesus contained in them as largely legendary, the fabrication of the post-Easter consciousness of the early church. Yet, most New Testament scholars (leaving aside the Jesus Seminar) believe that it is possible to peer through the legendary accretions and recover accurate information about the sayings and deeds of the historical Jesus. They accomplish this feat through the use of what are called the *criteria of authenticity*. These are principles that may be employed to study works that are not considered generally reliable historically in order to identify stories and sayings within those works that are historically authentic. So, in theory, the New Testament scholar can apply these criteria to particular sayings or deeds of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and make probable (sometimes highly probable) judgments to the effect that, "Yes, Jesus really said or did that." The most commonly employed criteria of authenticity are:

- (1) *The criterion of dissimilarity*—if a saying of Jesus is different from what was taught in first-century Judaism and from what was taught in the post-Easter church, then it is authentic.

- (2) *The criterion of multiple attestation*—if a saying or deed of Jesus is attested in more than one independent source, then it is authentic.<sup>15</sup>
- (3) *The criterion of embarrassment*—a saying or deed of Jesus, or other report in the Gospels, that would prove awkward or embarrassing from the standpoint of the writer or the early church is authentic.
- (4) *The criterion of Palestinian environment*—a saying or deed of Jesus that reflects an early Palestinian cultural or social context is authentic.
- (5) *The criterion of coherence*—a saying or deed of Jesus that does not pass any of the previous four criteria but significantly coheres with those sayings and deeds which do is authentic.

The basic point behind the use of these criteria is that individual stories, pericope, sayings, and deeds within the Gospels that meet these criteria can be said to be items of historical knowledge. And these items are known apart from any assumption of the Gospels' divine inspiration or even historical reliability. The items that pass these tests are known on *purely historical grounds*—grounds accessible to believer and unbeliever alike.

At this point we need to point out that from the standpoint of logic, these criteria can only be used as positive, and not negative, tests for authenticity. That is, we can say with some confidence that New Testament texts that pass these criteria are authentic. But, we *cannot* say that texts which fail to meet these criteria are inauthentic. It simply doesn't follow logically that texts that cannot be known to be authentic must therefore be inauthentic. All we can legitimately say about texts that do not meet the criteria is that they are not known (on historical grounds) to be authentic. Sound historical method requires a withholding of judgment one way or the other on such texts. Yet, it is here that many liberal scholars—especially the Jesus Seminar—falter. They tend to approach the Gospels with the unwarranted assumption that they are guilty until proven innocent, legendary unless proven authentic. Armed with this assumption they automatically assume

further that any text that fails to meet the criteria of authenticity must be a fabrication of the early church.<sup>16</sup>

Many Christian philosophers and apologists are probably familiar with the use of these criteria in recent years in support of the biblical portrait of Jesus and his resurrection. Conservative New Testament scholars like Craig Blomberg, Darrell Bock, Craig Evans, Ben Witherington, and others, have used this historical methodology to authenticate a wide range of material in the Gospel tradition and show, contrary to the likes of the Jesus Seminar, that the historical Jesus was very much like what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John describe him to be.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, apologists such as William Lane Craig and Gary Habermas have utilized these criteria to make powerful arguments for the resurrection of Jesus by showing that the accounts of Jesus' resurrection are authentic.<sup>18</sup>

Somewhat less known, but not completely absent, are attempts to argue for the divine inspiration of Scripture on the same grounds, utilizing the criteria of authenticity to establish the historical fact that Jesus taught the Bible's divine authority, and bolstering that teaching with the evidence for his resurrection and claims to deity. James E. Taylor is one scholar who gives a brief sketch of this approach, but does not develop it. He writes,

If Jesus is the risen Son of God, then we can trust what he says. We have good historical grounds for believing that Jesus regarded the Old Testament as God's Word, and therefore we have good reason to believe that it is. In addition, to the extent that we have good historical reasons to think that Jesus really said what the Gospel writers report, we have good reason to regard those dominical sayings as the Word of God. Moreover, Jesus commissioned the apostles to preach the gospel about him to the world. He told them he would send the Holy Spirit to enable them to remember what he had taught them. Since we have good historical grounds for thinking that the New Testament documents were written by an apostle, someone closely associated with an apostle who would be able reliably to record his teaching, or at least someone who faithfully

employed apostolic sources, it is reasonable to conclude that the New Testament is God's Word.<sup>19</sup>

After giving a brief discussion of Jesus' teaching on the inspiration of Old and New Testaments from both a more traditional (that is, HRV) stance and a critical one, Gary Habermas also provides a sketch of the structure of the whole argument:

Using both traditional and critical paths to determine that Jesus firmly taught inspiration, we may reassert our earlier assumption that if God raised Jesus from the dead, then the most likely reason was to confirm the truthfulness of Jesus' teachings. If we are correct in this, then the inspiration of Scripture follows as a verified doctrine, affirmed by God Himself when He raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>20</sup>

This approach to defending the inspiration of Scripture by utilizing the criteria of authenticity to establish Jesus' belief in the Bible's inspiration, together with his teaching concerning his own deity and the historicity of the resurrection verified by the same means, I will call the *Critical Version* (CV) of the Christological approach to defending Scripture. As far as I know, no one has ever laid out the CV approach to the inspiration of the Bible in a formal way. In the remainder of this essay, I wish to do so and make some comments on the defense of the argument's premises. The structure of the argument may be formalized as follows:

- (1) Jesus taught that he is God incarnate.
- (2) God authenticated Jesus' teaching by raising him from the dead.
- (3) Hence, Jesus is God incarnate.
- (4) Jesus (God incarnate) taught that the Old Testament is divinely inspired and he promised the inspiration of the New Testament through his apostles.
- (5) Therefore, the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) is divinely inspired.

The first thing to notice about this argument is that it neither makes nor assumes any claims about the Bible's historical reliability. CV defends its premises—(1), (2), and (4)—by employing the criteria of authenticity. This clearly sets CV apart from HRV and shows it to be a stronger and potentially more persuasive argument. Let's consider briefly how CV can establish the truth of the premises without the assumption of historical reliability.

*Comment on Premise (1).* Much work has already been done by conservative scholars in showing that the historical Jesus made exalted claims about his identity.<sup>21</sup> I cannot rehearse all of that research here, but I will mention one line of evidence corroborated by the criteria of authenticity. It is well-known that Jesus' favorite self-designation was "Son of Man." We know that Jesus used this title of himself, first, because it meets the criterion of dissimilarity. The title is used of Jesus (at most) only three times in the New Testament outside the Gospels and just as rarely in other early Christian writings. It was also not a title given to the Messiah in the first century. The title also meets the criterion of multiple attestation, being found in every layer of the Gospel tradition (e.g., *Mark*: Mark 2:10; 10:45; 14:62 / *Q*: Matt. 11:19= Luke 7:34 / *Matthew*: Matt. 13:37, 41 / *Luke*: Luke 18:8 / John 3:13). The significance of this title, first and foremost, is that it is connected by Mark (14:62) to the divine Son of Man figure in Daniel 7:13-14. Moreover, in Mark 2:10, the "Son of Man" has the power on earth to forgive sins, something that only God can do. And in John 3:13-18, the "Son of Man" is the one who has "descended from heaven" and is the "only begotten Son of God."

*Comment on Premise (2).* The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is well-attested and has been elaborated and defended ably by several Christian apologists, as I mentioned above. Those who defend the resurrection using the criteria of authenticity typically argue that there are a handful of facts established by the criteria that are best explained by the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>22</sup> These facts include (a) Jesus' empty tomb, (b) the post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and (c) the belief of the disciples in the resurrection of Jesus. I will not rehearse the details of these arguments, either, but suffice it to say that each of these facts is multiply attested and passes other of the criteria of authenticity. It is important to emphasize, though, that

there are no plausible naturalistic explanations for these facts. All the naturalistic proposals to date lack explanatory power and scope (i.e., no naturalistic hypothesis really explains the facts adequately, and no one naturalistic hypothesis explains *all* the facts). The hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead, on the other hand, has clear explanatory power and maximum explanatory scope. If God raised Jesus from the dead, then we can explain why the tomb was found empty, why the disciples saw post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and why they came to believe he was resurrected. And this one hypothesis accounts for all the facts together. Hence, we have strong evidence that God raised Jesus from the dead.

At this point, it might be helpful to interject that I think that CV is strongest when presented in the context of a theistic worldview. That is, the argument will have its greatest force if the apologist and his interlocutor already assume the existence of God. Indeed, I have stated premise (2) in a way that can be taken to presuppose the existence of God. What I am saying is that CV fits most comfortably with a *classical apologetic methodology* in which God's existence is established via natural theology and is then part of one's background knowledge as one comes to the question of historical evidences for Christianity. This does not mean that only classical apologists can use CV. After all, one of its major proponents, Gary Habermas, is an *evidential* apologist who believes that one can use the evidence for the resurrection as an argument for God's existence. Nevertheless, it seems to me and other classical apologists that if one already knows that God exists—a God who can perform miracles—then when one comes to the question of Jesus' resurrection, one can significantly increase the antecedent probability of Jesus resurrection, thus making the case for that miracle stronger than it would otherwise be.<sup>23</sup>

Another ancillary point to premise (2) is captured by Craig when he concludes, "Given the religio-historical context in which this event occurred, the significance of Jesus' resurrection is clear: it is the divine vindication of Jesus' radical personal claims."<sup>24</sup> Being a divine miracle, Jesus' resurrection is *ipso facto* a divine endorsement of his teaching. We may reasonably surmise that God is not in the habit of raising false prophets from the dead. And Jesus certainly claimed to be a prophet and much more—he claimed to be God incarnate, as we have

seen. God's resurrecting him, then, must constitute a vindication of his teaching about himself. This point allows us to draw the inference in step (3) of the argument that Jesus is God incarnate.

*Comment on Premise (4).* Not only does God's resurrection of Jesus vindicate his claim to deity, it vindicates his teaching on any other topic on which he spoke. Premise (4) thus carries the burden of showing that Jesus had something to say about the inspiration of Scripture. That burden can be met by citing texts in the Gospels in which Jesus teaches the inspiration of Scripture and showing that those texts meet the criteria of authenticity.

Regarding the Old Testament, we know that Jesus acknowledged and embraced the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures held by his Jewish contemporaries. He referred more than once to the Hebrew Scriptures by the common phrase, "The Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 5:17; 22:40), and at least once to the three-fold division of the Hebrew Old Testament: "Law, Prophets, and Psalms" (Luke 24:44). This should come as no surprise. Being a Jew in first-century Palestine, Jesus would naturally appeal to the same body of Scripture and have the same view of them as his contemporaries. These sayings aptly meet the criterion of Palestinian environment. And what view, precisely, would Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries have of the Hebrew Scriptures? Obviously, they would have thought of them as the Word of God.

This perspective on Jesus' view of the Old Testament is corroborated by the work of John Wenham. He delineates Jesus' view of the Hebrew Scriptures under the following headings, each of which is multiply attested:<sup>25</sup>

- (1) *Jesus treated the Old Testament narratives as records of fact* (Mark: Mark 2:23-28 / Q: Matt. 11:23-24=Luke 10:13-15; Matt. 23:34-36=Luke 11:49-51 / John 8:56-58).
- (2) *Jesus appealed authoritatively to the Old Testament in matters of controversy* (Mark: Mark 12:18-27; 12:18-27 / Q: Matt. 5:17-20=Luke 16:16-17; Matt. 11:2-6=Luke 7:18-23 / M: Matt. 9:13).
- (3) *Jesus appealed to the Old Testament as an authoritative guide to ethics* (Mark: Mark 10:2-9 / John 7:19).

- (4) *Jesus quoted the Old Testament as binding on himself at his temptations (Mark: Mark 1:12-13 / Q: Matt. 4:1-11=Luke4:1-13).*<sup>26</sup>
- (5) *Jesus taught that the Old Testament bore witness to him (L: Luke 24:25-27 / John 5:39-40).*
- (6) *Jesus attributed the authorship of Old Testament passages to God (Mark: Mark 7:6-8; 10:6-9; 12:36 / M: Matt. 1:22-23; 2:15 / John 10:35).*
- (7) *Jesus taught that Old Testament prophecies must be fulfilled (M: Matt. 26:54 / L: Luke 24:25-27, 44 / John 13:18).*

I submit, along with Wenham, that the best explanation for these multiply attested facts is that Jesus believed the Old Testament to be divinely inspired as did his Jewish contemporaries.

Concerning the New Testament, we have historical evidence supporting the following two statements:

- (1) *Jesus commissioned the apostles to be his authoritative spokesmen (Mark: Mark 3:13-19 / M: Matt. 16:18-19; 28:18-20 / Q: Matt. 19:28=Luke18:30 / L: Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8).*
- (2) *Jesus promised the apostles the Holy Spirit to enable them to remember his teaching and provide further divine revelation (Mark: Mark 13:11 / L: Luke 24:48-49 / John 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15).*

As Wenham explains, this historical evidence shows that “Jesus in principle authenticated the New Testament.”<sup>27</sup> We may add that the notion that Jesus would promise the divine inspiration of his apostolic ambassadors is coherent with what was established under premise (1) of the CV argument. If Jesus claimed to be God incarnate, it is not inconsistent to believe that he would promise to inspire his apostles to receive special revelation in the New Covenant era just as God did for his prophets in the old covenant era.

With the historical knowledge that Jesus taught the divine inspiration of the Bible, coupled with the earlier conclusion that he is God incarnate (and thus inerrant in what he teaches), we may infer



that the Bible is the Word of God. Such is the structure of CV. Of course, I have provided here only an outline of the main contours of the argument. Various details concerning the premises have been developed and elaborated more thoroughly by others as I indicated. It is my hope that Christian apologists who teach and write in the field will incorporate CV into their work and seek to equip others to use it for the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

### *On the Place of Historical Reliability and Prophetic Fulfillment*

Let me conclude by commenting on how I see evidence for the Bible's reliability as well as its unity and transforming power fitting in with the use of CV. Since the CV argument does not require the historical reliability of the Bible to establish divine inspiration—nor an antecedent commitment to unity or transforming power—it would seem to me that discussions of these things can properly *follow* discussions of inspiration as necessary corollaries of the latter. In other words, once we have determined that the Bible is divinely revealed, we may ask what other characteristics this inspired book will have. We may plausibly conclude that an inspired book will be historically reliable insofar as it addresses historical matters. We will likely conclude (as we in fact do) that the Bible is inerrant. We may likewise conclude that its message will be unified and consistent. And we may surmise that at least one purpose for which God has given us the Bible is to make us better.

Once we have drawn such conclusions, we may treat them as items to be tested to further corroborate (or disconfirm) our initial belief in inspiration, much as a scientist treats the implications of his theories. So, we look for evidence of the Bible's historical reliability; we seek to find solutions to texts that appear errant; we seek to show the Bible's intrinsic unity; and we observe the lives of those who believe the Bible to be God's Word to see how that belief has made them better. And if, as we believe, the Bible is divinely inspired, our search for such things will be fruitful.

But what about fulfilled prophecy? This was another aspect of the inherent character approach and often plays a role in many types of evidentialist defenses of Scripture. It would seem to me that fulfilled prophecy, specifically Jesus' fulfillment of messianic prophecies, can come into play at two points in the argument for Scripture. First, any prophetic fulfillments that can be shown to meet the criteria of authenticity (e.g., the virgin conception accounts and Jesus' birth in Bethlehem are both multiply attested) can play a significant role in defense of premise (1), supporting Jesus' claims to be Messiah and God. Second, those same fulfillments, insofar as they are historically verified by the criteria of authenticity, can supplement the case for the inspiration of the Old Testament. Though premise (4) of the argument seeks to ground our apologetic for the Old Testament in the verbal testimony of Jesus, his life of fulfilled prophecy can provide further corroboration that the Hebrew Scriptures are the Word of God.

### Notes

1. I have been told that Charles Spurgeon held this opinion, saying that we need not defend the Bible any more than we need to defend a lion. Rather, we just need to set it loose!
2. The term "evidentialism" is used in three distinct ways in apologetic and philosophical circles. In the first sense, it refers to a family of apologetic methods that share a similar approach to the relationship between faith and reason, namely, that they are compatible and that reason may provide rational support for the truth of the Christian religion, reasons that appeal to "common ground" between believers and unbelievers. In the second sense, "evidentialism" refers to one particular school of apologetics in the family of methods mentioned under the first sense—the school that stresses the offering primarily of historical evidences for the deity and resurrection of Jesus without a prior philosophical argument for God's existence. Thirdly, "evidentialism" can refer to the arch-enemy of Reformed epistemology, namely, the view that it is wrong to accept any belief without sufficient evidence. In this paper (with one exception), I am using "evidentialism" in the first sense only.
3. Interestingly, however, even apologists in the evidential family of apologetics often neglect to address the topic of Scripture's inspiration. For example, two very popular apologetics texts are J.P. Moreland's *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) and William Lane Craig's *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994). Both of these books contain detailed and persuasive arguments for the historical reliability of the Bible (a conclusion that can play a role in an argument for inspiration),

but have nothing to say by way of defending the Bible's inspiration per se. A more recent apologetics anthology is touted on its back cover as providing a "comprehensive Christian response" to challenges to Christianity and including essays on "all major aspects of apologetics" (Francis J. Beckwith, et al., *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004]), yet it contains no article defending even the historical reliability of Scripture, much less its divine inspiration. I have no idea why these texts neglect the topic at hand. Fortunately, other apologetics texts do not.

4. Chad Meister, *Building Belief: Constructing Faith from the Ground Up* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).
5. Meister also cites the internal testimony of the Spirit as evidence that individuals who have it can look to in order to confirm their belief in the Bible's inspiration. However, this does not seem to be a point on which he would build an apologetic case.
6. See, e.g., A.W. Pink, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (Authors for Christ, 2007).
7. Of course, if appeal to the fulfillment of prophecy is preceded by a defense of the New Testament's historical reliability (as in the case of Meister's book), then this last point loses some of its force.
8. This approach to defending the inspiration of Scripture appears to trace back to B.B. Warfield in his book, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), esp. 114-118.
9. See Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 353.
10. R.C. Sproul, "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974), 242-61.
11. Another popular text that takes the same approach is Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It: The Case for Christianity* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997).
12. Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 304.
13. For discussions and applications of these tests see Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, rev. ed. (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1979), 39-78; Meister, *Building Belief*, 129-147; Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 305-327; Corduan, *No Doubt About It*, 185-203; Craig Blomberg, "Where Do We Start Studying Jesus?," in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, eds. Michael Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 17-50.
14. See Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 255n3.
15. This criterion is most often employed in light of the Four-source Hypothesis that holds that there are four independent sources behind the synoptic tradition: Mark (from whom Luke and Matthew borrowed), Q (the source for the material

- common to Luke and Matthew but absent from Mark), L (the source for the material unique to Luke), and M (the source for the material unique to Matthew). When one adds the material in John's Gospel and the testimony of Paul's epistles, there are six potential sources for applying the criterion of multiple attestation.
16. See the articles in Wilkins and Moreland, eds., *Jesus Under Fire*, for ample documentation of this egregious approach to the NT Gospels. Another critical error in methodology that many liberal scholars commit is the inconsistent application of the criteria of authenticity. This results in many texts that ought to pass muster being dismissed as inauthentic. Such inconsistent application of the criteria appears to be usually motivated by a hidden Christological criterion that refuses to allow any text to be recognized as authentic if it supports a high Christology, whether or not it meets stated criteria of authenticity. As Darrell Bock puts it, this approach is not good historiography but philosophical bias (see Darrell Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex," in *Jesus Under Fire*, 90-94).
  17. See, Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 310-321; *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); Craig A. Evans, "What Did Jesus Do?" in *Jesus Under Fire*, 101-115; *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); Darrell L. Bock, "The Words of Jesus"; *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995).
  18. William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1981); *Reasonable Faith*, 255-298; Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case of the Resurrection of Jesus*. See also, N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).
  19. James E. Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics: Cultivating Christian Commitment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 277-278.
  20. Gary R. Habermas, "Jesus and the Inspiration of Scripture," *Areopagus Journal* 2:1 (January 2002): 11-16.
  21. See, e.g., William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 243-252; Ben Witherington, "The Christology of Jesus Revisited," in *To Everyone an Answer*, 145-159; Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 166-171.
  22. See Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 272-298; Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 43-77.
  23. For more on this point, see William Lane Craig, "A Classical Apologist's Closing Remarks," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 316-17, 324-27.
  24. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 297.
  25. John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 16-34.

26. Here the Old Testament quotations themselves are not multiply attested but merely the fact that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. Nevertheless, the Old Testament quotations are found in Q, an early reliable source.
27. *Ibid.*, 113.