

Defending Inerrancy: A Response to Methodological Unorthodoxy

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Brief Background of the Discussion²

In the past generation the debate about inerrancy has shifted from the domain of bibliography to that of methodology; from what the Bible affirms about itself to how the Bible should be interpreted. Most evangelicals who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible would agree with the Lausanne Covenant statement: “We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice....” Of course, the Bible is true in all it affirms, but the question has refocused on specifically the content that the Bible is affirming in a given passage. Or, to put it another way, evangelicals do not so much debate whether the Bible is “true,” but what is meant by “true,” and how we know such truth.

Viewed from a historical perspective, the current movement has been away from unlimited inerrancy view of the total truthfulness of Scripture, as defended by Hodge and Warfield, to a form of limited inerrancy³ which Jack

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² For background on the significant changes occurring among evangelicals regarding ICBI, see Jason S. Sexton, “How Far Beyond Chicago? Assessing Recent Attempts to Reframe the Inerrancy Debate,” *Themelios* 34/1 (April 2009) n. p.

³ We need not address the additional problem that the very term “unlimited inerrancy” is a paradox. However, the redundancy is made necessary by the fact that some have limited the inerrancy of Scripture to redemptive or spiritual matters.

Rogers of Fuller Seminary and Donald McKim embraced, when they claimed that the Bible was unerring in its redemptive purpose, but not always in all of its factual affirmations.⁴ Rogers and McKim reacted to what they perceived to be the current view of inerrancy, which they misrepresented with the constant refrain: “To erect a standard of modern, technical precision in language as the hallmark of biblical authority was totally foreign to the foundation shared by the early church.” Instead, they termed the view to which they reacted a “rationalistic extreme” and asserted that “the central church tradition . . . more flexible than seventeenth-century scholasticism or nineteenth-century fundamentalism.”⁵ And again, “For early Christian teachers, Scripture was wholly authoritative as a means of bringing people to salvation and guiding them in the life of faith . . . Scripture was not used as a sourcebook for science.”⁶ The opinion of a number of scholars has shifted from the unlimited inerrancy of *The International Council of Biblical Inerrancy* (ICBI) to the limited inerrancy of Clark Pinnock in his *Scripture Principle* which allowed for minor mistakes and errors in the biblical text while retaining an inerrancy of purpose.⁷

Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary blames defection from the faith on the fact that evangelical Christians had been aggressively promoting plenary, verbal inspiration. He wrote: “The approach, famously supported back in 1976 by Harold Lindsell in his *Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan), that it is an all-or-nothing approach to Scripture that we must hold, is both profoundly mistaken and deeply dangerous. No historian worth his or her salt functions that way.” He adds, “But, despite inerrancy being the touchstone of the largely American organization called the Evangelical Theological Society, there are countless evangelicals in the States and especially in other parts of the world who hold that the Scriptures are inspired and authoritative, even if not inerrant, and they are not sliding down any slippery slope of any kind. I can’t help but wonder if inerrantist evangelicals making inerrancy the watershed for so much has not, unintentionally, contributed to pilgrimages like Ehrman’s. Once someone finds one apparent mistake or contradiction that they cannot resolve, then they believe the Lindsells of the world and figure they have to chuck it all. What a tragedy!”⁸

⁴ Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

⁵ *Ibid.*, xxii, xxiii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 457-58.

⁷ Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

⁸ <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2008/03/26/interview-with-craig-blomberg/> One might take note of the phenomenon that, no sooner had Blomberg protested against a “slippery slope” argument, he applied one directly to Bart Ehrman.

From the time of Robert Gundry (1983), who was asked to resign from ETS by an overwhelming 70% vote of the members, to the present there has been a growing movement away from unlimited inerrancy to limited inerrancy, the most recent being inerrancy of authorial intention by genre determination. This has come to focus recently in the work of Mike Licona in his book *The Resurrection of Jesus* (2010) in which he claimed, along with many other evangelical New Testament (NT) scholars, that one must make an up-front determination of genre categories of the type of literature we are dealing with before we approach the Gospels to decide which category they fit into.⁹ Licona admits the significant influence of Charles H. Talbert, Distinguished Professor of Religion at Baylor University, as well as British scholar and Dean of King's College London, the Reverend Doctor Richard A. Burridge.¹⁰ He wrote, "Before we can read the gospels, we have to discover what kind of books they might be."¹¹ Supposedly, by a study of the Roman (and Jewish) literature of the time, Licona comes to the NT with a genre category already set, claiming, that "[t]here is somewhat of a consensus among contemporary scholars that the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography (*bios*)."¹² Then he goes on to say that "*Bio* offered the ancient biographer great flexibility for rearranging material and inventing speeches . . . and they often included legend. Because *bios* was a flexible genre, it is often difficult to determine where history ends and legend begins."¹² With this category in mind, he looks at the Gospel record and concludes that it best fits into this "Greco-Roman biography" which allows for "legend," "inventing speeches," "embellishment," and permitting other factual errors. Thus, when he looks at the story of the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27:51-54, he concluded that it is "poetical," a "legend," an

The truth is that the very fact that this entire debate is taking place testifies to the existence of the slope and that it is quite slippery. Admittedly, the "all or nothing at all" argument is fallacious when used of the Bible, if one is speaking only of its reliability. For it could be reliable in general, even if not in all particulars. However, when speaking of the Bible *as the Word of God*, finding just one real error would undermine its claim to be the Word of God in everything it affirms. For finding even one error would reduce it to the level of any other purely human book.

⁹ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 34, 54, 96, 143, 186, 202-204, 338-339, 548-553, 570, 593, 596-597.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, See Charles H. Talbert, *What is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*. Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004).

¹¹ Burridge, *Gospels*, 324.

¹² See Licona, *Resurrection*, 34, emphasis added in these citations.

“embellishment,” and a literary “special effects.”¹³ He also presents “**A possible candidate for embellishment is John 18:4-6**” [emphasis added] where, when Jesus claimed “I am he” (cf. John 8:58), his pursuers “drew back and fell on the ground.”¹⁴ Furthermore, Licona adds, “Considerations of genre, the demand for quality evidence, and methodological controls are important for all claims to historicity. In principle, a historian of Jesus might conclude that the resurrection hypothesis warrants a judgment of historicity while simultaneously concluding that certain elements of the Gospel narratives were mythical or were created while knowing only the historical kernel, such as that Jesus had healed a blind person.”¹⁵

These methodological concerns bring us to our next consideration of the two different views of hermeneutics.

Two Views of Hermeneutics in Contrast

Now granted Licona’s methodological presuppositions, these are not unreasonable conclusions. But this is precisely the problem, namely, there is no good reason to grant his methodology. Indeed, it is, as we shall see, another case of methodological unorthodoxy, not unlike that which Robert Gundry held and which led to his expulsion from ETS. The following chart summarizes the radical differences in the traditional historical grammatical view, adopted by ICBI, and that of “The New Historiographical Approach” of Licona and other contemporary evangelical NT scholars. Before we compare the two, we note that not everyone who holds one of more of these views would hold to the entire method named at the top. However, most scholars who hold the method would hold most of the views listed below.

| NAME OF METHOD | TRADITIONAL HISTORICAL-GRAMMATICAL VIEW | THE NEW HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH |
|---------------------|---|--|
| <i>Language</i> | Realism | Cultural Linguistic Conventionalism |
| <i>Epistemology</i> | Correspondence View of Truth | Intentionalist View of Truth ¹⁶ |

¹³ Ibid., 34, 306, 548, 552, 553.

¹⁴ Ibid., 306, n. 114.

¹⁵ Ibid., 570.

¹⁶ Licona claims to hold a correspondence view of truth but modifies it by insisting that “our knowledge of the past may not mirror reality” and may present “a blurred picture of

| | | |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| Intent of Author | Always Expressed in the Text Known only from the Text in Context | Not Always Expressed in the Text ¹⁷ Can be Known from Extra-Biblical Texts |
| Extra-Biblical Data | Can Illuminate Meaning of a Text Can Illuminate Meaning of Bible Words | Can Determine the Truth of a Text Can Determine Truth of a Sentences |
| Genre Types | Decided After Examining the Text Determined by the Text and Context | Decided Before Examining the Text Decided by Other Texts and Contexts |
| Nature of Meaning | Found in <i>What</i> not Why the Text Says True Meaning is the Author's Meaning | Found in <i>Why</i> not Just What a Text Says True Meaning is Reader's Meaning ¹⁸ |
| Number of Meanings | ONE: <i>Sensus Unum</i> | MANY: <i>Sensus Plenior</i> |
| Role of Context | Meaning Known from Author's Context Biblical Context is Determinative | Meaning known from Reader's Context Extra-Biblical Context can be Determinative |
| Historicity | Presumed in a Narrative Text | Not Presumed in a Narrative Text ¹⁹ |

what occurred," (Ibid., 92). Indeed, it may contain legend and not history (Ibid., 35, 306).

¹⁷ Ibid., 92.

¹⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. Second Revised Edition. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Crossroad, 2004 [1975, 1989]; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutic and Philosophical Speculation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1980); Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

¹⁹ Licona, *Resurrection*, 97-99.

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Legend | Not found in a Narrative Text | Sometimes Found in a Narrative Text ²⁰ |
| Symbolic | Can Represent Literal Events | Can Replace Literal Events |
| Figures of Speech | Must have Literal Referent | Need not have a literal Referent |
| Inspiration | Formally Distinct from Interpretation | Actually Separated from Interpretation ²¹ |
| Inerrancy | Unlimited (to all of the text) | Limited (to part of the text) ²² |
| Theological Truth | Lends itself to Systematic Theology Truth is in the Meaning of the Text Propositional Truth is Important | Lends itself to Biblical Theology Truth is in the Significance of the Text Propositional Truth is Diminished ²³ |

A Defense of the Historical-Grammatical View

Space allotted does not permit a detailed explanation of each point, nor a complete defense of “the Historical-Grammatical View” on the points listed. So, our comments will be limited to certain key points. For brevity we will call this the Traditional Approach (TA). The New Historiographical Approach we will label the New Approach (NA).

Language and Meaning

The TA is based on a realistic view of meaning, whereas the NA is based on a conventionalist view of meaning. Realists believe there is an objective basis for meaning and conventionalists do not. Both sides agree that *words* or symbols are

²⁰ Ibid., 185-86; 570.

²¹ Ibid., 208.

²² Ibid., 596.

²³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation,” Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutic, *JETS* 48/1 (March 2008) 89-115.

culturally relative, but unlike realists, conventionalists hold that all *meaning* is also culturally relative.²⁴

However, there are many good reasons for an evangelical to reject a conventionalist view of meaning.²⁵ First of all, if true then there could be no objective meaning or truth. Since all true statements are meaningful, it would follow that all meaning is also culturally relative. For to be a true statement is must be meaningful. But this is clearly contrary to the traditional, historic, and creedal confessions of evangelicalism which proclaim that certain essential beliefs are objective truth about reality.²⁶ Second, it is self-defeating to claim that “All meaning is subjective.” For that very statement claims to be objectively meaningful. So, the NA is based on a faulty subjectivists view of meaning.

Locus of Meaning

According to the TA, the meaning of a text is found in *what* the text affirms, not in *why* the text affirms it. Since we have defended this view elsewhere,²⁷ we will simply use one illustration here. Exodus commands: “Do not boil a kid (baby goat) in its mother’s milk” (Ex.34:26). The meaning of this text is very clear, and every Israelite knew exactly *what* to do. However, as a survey of a few commentaries will reveal, it is not at all clear to us *why* they were commanded to do this. So, meaning (what) can be understood apart from purpose (why). This is not to say that knowing purpose is not sometimes illuminating. Nor does it claim that purpose does not add to the significance of a statement. It often does. For example, if I say “Come over to my home tonight at 7 p.m.,” the meaning of the statement is very clear. However, if you know that my reason (purpose) for inviting you over was to give you a million dollars, then that detail adds significance to the statement—and to your motivation for coming! But the statement is clear and meaningful apart from what the purpose(s) might have been.

²⁴ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (NY: Macmillan, 1953) I:19, 23, 241; II, 194, 226.

²⁵ See Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), Chapter 6; John O’Callaghan, *Thomistic Realism and the Linguistic Turn* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2003).

²⁶ See Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *Conviction without Compromise: Standing Strong in the Core Beliefs of the Christian Faith* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008), Part One; Philip Schaaf, *The Creeds of Christendom*. Sixth Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), vol. 1: The History of the Creeds.

²⁷ See Norman L. Geisler, “The Relation of Purpose and Meaning in Interpreting Scripture” in [*Grace Theological Journal* 5/2 \(Fall 1984\)](#), 229-245.

As we demonstrated, Jack Rogers and Clark Pinnock clearly adopted this purpose-determines-meaning approach.²⁸ Licona appears to do the same in his misdirected use of “the author’s intent.”²⁹ For the fact is that we have no valid way to get at the biblical author’s intent except by what is expressed in the text of Scripture. Further, the problem of not placing the locus of meaning in the text is that apart from doing so we are left with no objective way to determine the meaning.³⁰ We are left with subjective and extra-biblical ways of determining what the text actually meant, and often we can never know that meaning for sure. Unfortunately, this is the point at which many NT scholars, primarily following the lead of E.P. Sanders and N.T. Wright, turn to extra-biblical data, such as Second Temple Judaism, to help them determine what the text means.³¹

True Meaning is the Author’s Meaning

According to the TA, the true meaning of a text is found in what the author meant by it, not in what the reader(s) may mean by it. A text means exactly what an author means by it and not what someone else means by it. To claim otherwise is self-defeating. For no author, no matter how post-modern he may be, allows that his book should be taken to mean anything but what he meant it to mean. Otherwise, a reader would be able to reject or reverse what an author meant and to replace it by what he wants it to mean. For example, Kevin Vanhoozer claims that one cannot say, as the ICBI did in its widely accepted “Chicago Statement,” that “the Bible is true and reliable in all matters it addresses (Art. XI).” Why? Because, strictly speaking, “‘it’ neither affirms nor addresses; authors do.”³² However, an ICBI framer, R.C. Sproul, in a personal letter to me [William Roach], responds to Kevin Vanhoozer stating:

But you asked particularly the question regarding Vanhoozer’s statement where he distinguishes between what the Bible addresses and what men or authors do. His statement, strictly speaking, *it* doesn’t

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Licona, *Resurrection*, 85, 195.

³⁰ For an excellent defense of objectivity in Hermeneutics, see Thomas Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (Atamonte Springs, FL: Advantage Books), 2004.

³¹ Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning In This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CONN: Yale University, 1967); E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993); *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); *The Resurrection and the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); *Paul: Fresh Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

³² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation?”, 106.

affirm or address anything, only authors do. This is worse than pedantic. It's simply silly. When we're talking about the Bible, the inerrancy position makes it clear that the Bible is a book written human authors, which authors address various matters. And whatever these authors address within the context of sacred Scripture, while under the supervision of the Holy Spirit, carries the full weight of inerrancy. It would seem to me that if somebody is trying to avoid the conclusions that the Chicago Statement reaches regarding inerrancy, it's a far reach to avoid them by such a distinction. In the final analysis, the distinction is a distinction without a difference [June 30, 2010].

Of course, the author speaks through a medium (language) that is common to both the author and reader. But the meaning embedded in that medium (language) is the author's meaning, not the reader's meaning or anyone else's meaning. And it is the reader's obligation to discover what the author's meaning encoded in that language actually was by decoding it, not to make up his own meaning.

Intent of Author is Expressed in the Text

Burridge made it clear that the intention or purpose of the author is "essential" in determining the meaning of a text.³³ The NA stresses the "intention" of the author, but it rejects what the TA means by "intention." First, "intention" can mean *purpose*, and we have already shown why purpose does not determine meaning. Second, "intention" can mean *unexpressed intention* that is not found in the text or in its context (see next point). But this is not what the TA means by use of the word "intention." The TA means *expressed intention* (i.e., meaning), that is, intention that is expressed in the text and which can be derived from the text by a reader who reads it properly in its context. Only this kind of expressed intention is objectively determinable. Unexpressed intention leaves the door of interpretation wide open to misinterpretation. Indeed, it leaves us with no objective way to discover the meaning of a text since there is no objective meaning expressed in the text. The true meaning of a text is not found *beyond* the text (in some extra-biblical texts),³⁴ or *beneath* the text (in some mystical

³³ Burridge, *Gospels*, 121.

³⁴ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 89-113; Darrell L. Bock, "The Historical Jesus, An Evangelical View," in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*. Eds. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009).

intuition), or *behind* the text (in the author's unexpressed intention).³⁵ Meaning is like beauty in that the beauty of a painting is not found *behind* it (in the painter's mind), nor *beyond* it (in the painter's purpose), but beauty is found expressed *in* the painting. Likewise, the real meaning of a text is found *in* the text as understood in its textual context. The author is the *efficient* cause of the meaning in the text, individual words are the *instrumental* cause used to express meaning, but meaning itself is found in the *formal cause*, the actual form these words take in a sentence, in a paragraph, and in the overall context of the book.

The Role of Context in Meaning

As just noted, meaning is found in a sentence (the smallest unit of meaning) in its context. Technically, single words in and of themselves have no meaning;³⁶ they merely have *usage* in a sentence which does have meaning. Furthermore, words do not just point to meaning; instead, they receive meaning by the biblical author when placed into a sentence. And biblical meaning is found in the biblical context. As the ICBI framers put it, "Scripture is to interpret Scripture" (Article XVIII). It adds, "WE INVITE RESPONSE TO THIS STATEMENT FROM ANY WHO SEE REASON TO AMEND ITS AFFIRMATIONS ABOUT SCRIPTURE BY THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE ITSELF, UNDER WHOSE INFALLIBLE AUTHORITY WE STAND AS WE SPEAK" (ICBI, PREAMBLE, EMPHASIS ADDED). As the old adage put it, "a text out of its context is a pretext." The only proper way to interpret the Bible is by the Bible. Every text is to be understood in its context in its paragraph, in its book, and, if needed, by other Scripture. For as the Reformers taught us through their "Analogy of Faith," the Bible is the best interpreter of the Bible.

Extra-biblical data or contexts cannot be determinative of the meaning of a biblical text. It can illuminate usage of words and customs, but it should never be used hermeneutically to determine the meaning of a biblical text. This is why the ICBI framers exhorted: "We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship" (Article XVIII).

The Role of Extra-Biblical Data

³⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*. Edited with Introduction by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

³⁶ Of course, there are single word sentences like "Go," but they have an implied subject meaning "[You] go."

This lead to an important distinction between the two views in the use of extra-biblical data. According to the TA position, extra-biblical data can illuminate meaning of a text (i.e., reveal some of its significance), but it cannot determine the meaning or truth of a text. All the factors to determine the meaning of a biblical text are in the text taken in its context.³⁷

Of course, individual words used in that text, especially *hapax legomena* (words only used once in the Bible), can be illuminated by extra-biblical usage of these terms but this extra-biblical usage cannot determine truth of a biblical sentence. The form (*formal cause*) of meaning is the text itself. At best, extra-biblical data can only help us understand the meaning of a word (which is part of the *material cause*), but it cannot determine the meaning of the text itself. The word is only a part of the total form in the grammatical structure of the text—which structure we get only in the text itself. Words are like pieces in a puzzle; they can be key to completing the picture, but they are only a piece of the picture. The picture (the form) itself is found only in the text (the whole picture). Either the piece (word) fits or it does not fit into the picture (form) found in the text.

Also, extra-biblical data can illuminate customs expressed in a text, but they cannot determine the meaning or truth of the passage which that custom is found in. Thus, commands about taking a staff, wearing sandals, or kissing the brethren are illuminated by the culture, but they do not determine the truth of any biblical passage in which they are found. And to borrow a Jewish or Greco-Roman legend to determine the meaning of a biblical text is methodologically misdirected and can lead to what is theologically tragic, namely, denying the historicity of the text.³⁸ For example, the fact that there were ancient creation or flood stories other than the Bible can illuminate (and even help confirm) the biblical story, but they should not replace it, nor should they be used to undermine the historicity of the biblical stories. Thus, ICBI declared: “We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood” (Article XII). And the official ICBI commentary adds, “We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual.” Further, “Some, for instance, take Adam to be a

³⁷ See John H. Sailhamer, “The Hermeneutics of Premillennialism,” *Faith and Mission* 18/1 (2000) 96-109; *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009).

³⁸ See Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

myth, whereas in Scripture he is presented as a real person. Others take Jonah to be an allegory when he is presented as a historical person and [is] so referred to by Christ” (EH Article XIII).³⁹

Correspondence view of Truth

These considerations lead to another important difference between the TA and the NA. The historical-grammatical approach implies a correspondence view of truth. But the new hermeneutic often entails an intentionalist view of truth. Truth as correspondence means a statement is true if it corresponds to the facts, to the reality to which it points. Intentionalists, on the other hand, claim that truth is found in the author’s intent (purpose) which we cannot always know from the biblical text itself, but sometimes only by the determination of a literary genre based outside of the biblical text itself. But if truth is found in intention, whether the intention is redemption or anything else beneficial, then any well-intended statement is true, even if it is mistaken—which is patently absurd.

Further, there are fatal flaws in the intentionalist view of truth. One of them was implied by a proponent of the view himself. Clark Pinnock wrote, “I supported the 1978 Chicago Statement of The international Council on Biblical Inerrancy,” noting that Article XIII “made room for nearly every well-intentioned Baptist....”⁴⁰ He was referring to Article XIII which said that “We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose.” But this is clearly contrary to what the ICBI framers meant by inerrancy, as is revealed in its official commentary on those very articles. ICBI declared explicitly “When we say that the truthfulness of Scripture ought to be evaluated according to its own standards that means that ... all the claims of the Bible must correspond with reality, whether that reality is historical, factual or spiritual” (Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy [EI]*, 41). It adds, “By biblical standards truth and error is meant the view used both in the Bible and in everyday life, viz., a correspondence view of truth. This part of the article is directed toward who would redefine truth to relate merely to redemptive intent, the purely personal, or the like, rather than to mean that which corresponds with reality” (Sproul EI, 43-44).

Further, the denial of the correspondence view of truth is self-defeating. For the claim that “Truth is not what corresponds to reality” is itself a statement that

³⁹ See Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam* (Grand Rapids: Baker/Brazos, 2012); John Polkinghorne, *Testing Scripture: A Scientist Explores the Bible* (Baker/Brazos, 2011); Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 202-203.

⁴⁰ Clark Pinnock, *Scripture Principle*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) 266.

implicitly claims that it corresponds to reality. This is to say nothing of the fact that the Bible everywhere assumes a correspondence view of truth, as do people in their everyday lives.⁴¹ Likewise, both science and the courts assume a correspondence view of truth.⁴² So, the correspondence view of truth is biblical, unavoidable, and rationally undeniable. But the “New Historiographical View” rejects the traditional correspondence view for a modified position by affirming a “blurred [correspondence] picture” of what occurred with the “intention” of the author.⁴³

Use of Genre Types in Scripture⁴⁴

Virtually everyone agrees that there are different genre in Scripture: narratives (Acts), poetry (Psalms), parables (Gospels), and even allegory (Gal. 4). There are also figures of speech, including hyperbole (Mt. 23:24), simile (Psa. 1:3), metaphor (Psa. 18:2), symbolic language (Rev. 1:20), and so on. These are not in dispute. What is in dispute between the TA and NA methods of interpretation is whether genre determination made apart from the biblical text can be used as hermeneutically determinative of the meaning of a biblical text.⁴⁵ Clearly the “New Historiographical Approach” espoused by Licona and other evangelicals holds that it can.⁴⁶ For Licona argued that that **“there is somewhat of a consensus among contemporary scholars that the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography (*bios*).”**⁴⁷ But how could they know this genre classification before they ever look at the biblical text.⁴⁸ Maybe the

⁴¹ See Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, in One Volume (Baker, 2012), chapter 7.

⁴² See Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 233-253.

⁴³ Licona, *Resurrection.*, 85, 195.

⁴⁴ See: “Genre Criticism,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and The Bible*. Eds. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 165-216.

⁴⁵ See Tom Howe, “Does Genre Determine Meaning?,” *Christian Apologetics Journal* (SES) 6/1 (Spring 2007) 2-17.

⁴⁶ See Andreas Köstenberger and Richard Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2011), 237-574; Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?*(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) ; Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, Eds. *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

⁴⁷ Licona, *Resurrection.*, 34, 54, 202-204, 548-553, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Kevin Vanhoozer tries to redefine himself as a literary inerrantist. But this is little more than the syncretizing of genre-criticism and the traditional categories of inerrancy.

Gospels are a unique genre category of their own.⁴⁹ Maybe, despite some similarities with Greco-Roman biography, the Gospels are a unique category of their own that can only be known by examining the Gospels themselves and their relation to the rest of Scripture. Or, perhaps the Gospels are in the broad category of redemptive history. But, as the ICBI framers remind us, “Though the Bible is indeed *redemptive* history, it is also redemptive *history*, and this means that the acts of salvation wrought by God actually occurred in the space-time world” (Sproul, EI, 37).

According to the traditional historical-grammatical interpretation, the genre types that are applicable to the biblical text are not fixed outside of the biblical text.⁵⁰ They are decided by examining the biblical text itself with the historical-grammatical method and discovering whether they should be taken literally or not. ICBI declared: “We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.” (Article XIII). But all of this is determined by looking at the phenomena of Scripture itself, not by making external genre decisions.⁵¹

As we will show below, the TA has the presumption of literalness, unless proven to the contrary.⁵² Hence, if the text says this is it a “parable,” an “allegory” (cf. Gal. 4:24) or it is only “like” what it is speaking about, then there are grounds for taking it in a non-literal sense. Even then symbols and other figures of speech often contain a literal truth about a literal truth. For example, while calling God a rock is a metaphor (since the Bible says he *is* “Spirit”—Jn. 4:24), nonetheless, God does have rock-like characteristics, such durability and stability.

⁴⁹ Burrige appears to be inconsistent at this point, claiming both that genre categories are determined before we come to the text (*Gospels*, 324) and yet that genre “must be discovered by internal examination” of the text (*Ibid.*, 55).

⁵⁰ See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” in *Inerrancy*. Ed. Norm Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 116-147; *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1985).

⁵¹ J. I. Packer, “Encountering Present-Day Views of Scripture,” in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*. Ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 61-82.

⁵² J. I. Packer, ‘*Fundamentalism*’ and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 11, 99, 102 ff.

Another difficulty with the idea that genre “gives meaning” view is that the interpreter must read the text and attempt to discern the patterns that would indicate conformity to the characteristics of a particular genre.⁵³ This requires that the person have a rudimentary knowledge of the text prior to classifying the genre. This rudimentary knowledge occurs when a person approaches the text according to the historical-grammatical interpretive methodology, which goes from the particulars to the whole.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the idea that genre determines meaning suffers from another logical mistake. In order to discover the genre of a particular text, one must already have developed a genre theory. As Professor Howe notes: “But a genre theory comes from studying and comparing individual texts, and this is done prior to and apart from genre classification. If this is so, then it must be the case that there is some meaning communicated to the interpreter apart from whether the interpreter has recognized any given genre classification. But, if genre determines meaning, then this scenario is impossible. The interpreter must know the genre before he knows the text. But this is tantamount to imposing genre expectations upon the text.”⁵⁵ In hermeneutics, we label this as eisegesis!

In the light of this, the ICBI statement on genre is taken out of context by the “new historiographical method.” The ICBI statement reads: “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, *taking account of its literary forms and devices*, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture” (Article XVIII, emphasis added). This does not mean that genre types derived from outside of Scripture should be used to determine the meaning of Scripture. For the preceding phrase states clearly that very next sentence stresses that it is “**the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis**” and the following sentence insists that “**Scripture is to interpret Scripture**” (emphasis added). Then it goes on to excluded extra-biblical sources used to determine the meaning of Scripture, proclaiming that: “We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, **dehistoricizing**, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship” (emphasis added). But this is precisely what Mike Licona and the NA do in proclaiming that certain NT Gospel texts were (or could be) legends.⁵⁶

⁵³ Thomas Howe, “Does Genre Determine Meaning?,” 10-11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁵⁶ Licona, *Resurrection.*, 34, 306, 548, 552-53.

We need to underscore the fact that the literary genres perceived in biblical as well as classical literature are for the most part generalizations created by scholars over the last few centuries. It is highly unlikely that the human authors of the Bible selected a particular genre for a specific passage and then made sure that they abided by the requirements mandated for the genre of their choice. It is true that some forms of literature are written according to some stated set of rules. However, the genres of literature frequently invoked for various Bible passages have no rules, only the criteria used by scholars to categorize them. They may be valid generalizations, but one cannot use them as sufficiently invariable to draw inferences from them.

For example, it is almost universally accepted the Old Testament contains a genre called “poetry,” and it is an easy to move from there to the conclusion that poetry consists of figures of speech, thereby possibly weakening the factual meaning of a passage. However, in contrast to other languages and cultures, Hebrew “poetry” is highly ambiguous as a literary genre. For the last few centuries textbooks have generally stated that Hebrew poetry manifests itself in parallelism. However, this idea did not become popular until 1754 with the publication of the book *Praelectiones Academiae de Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews) by Robert Lowth. Subsequent scholars have expanded on the nature of parallelism to the point where it has practically lost its meaning because there remain few verses that would not fit one of the alleged types of parallelism. For example, E. W. Bullinger, lists seven types of parallelism.⁵⁷ But there still are problems with this classification. The criteria are not sufficient to reach agreement which passages exhibit parallelism (cf. e.g. Isaiah 37:30, which is translated as poetry in only some English versions). On the other hand, numerous texts exhibiting parallelism (e.g. Lamech’s nasty outburst in Genesis 4:23-24) do not seem to fit our intuitive understanding of “poetry.” We certainly cannot infer from the presence of parallelism that a passage must also contain figures of speech or symbolism. This much is certain: To classify a text as “poetry” on the basis of parallelism, and then to use that classification as a reason to deny its facticity is to go way beyond what can be gleaned from either our reconstructions of the genre or of the content of the Bible.⁵⁸

Similarly, the genre of apocalyptic writing is a general category created inductively by scholars, and, thus, should not be used deductively to infer certain

⁵⁷ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Eyres & Spottiswoode, 1898), p. 350.

⁵⁸ We are indebted to Professor Win Corduan for the points made in this and the following paragraph. See: Licona, 143; Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

features of a text. The name is based on the book of Revelation, the Apocalypse. Thus apocalyptic writing is literature in the style of the book of Revelation. Isaiah 24—27 is alleged to be an early example of it, and Daniel supposedly brought the style to maturity. It is also found in apocryphal books such as Enoch, 2 Esdras, and the Assumption of Moses. Once one takes a close look at all of these books and passages, it becomes clear that not one of them meets all of the criteria usually ascribed to apocalypticism. For example, not all look to the immediate future for redemption, not all are pseudepigraphal, not all depict a redeemer figure, not all are written in a time of despair, not all contain angels, and so forth. One cannot deny that there are similarities in style among the aforementioned texts, and it is legitimate to summarize those similarities for the sake of convenience with the term “apocalyptic style,” as long as we keep in mind its Protean nature. Having labeled a passage as “apocalyptic,” it would be a serious mistake on that basis to deduce anything about the passage that is not directly contained in it.

The discovery of genres continues, as we see with the references to “bioi” of late. Doing so may be helpful in understanding specific pieces of writing, including Bible passages. However genre criticism should never strait-jacket any particular passage, biblical or otherwise, in order to make it fit into the scholar’s inductively derived category. Logically, to use genre criticism to as a tool to question the historicity of a passage is to commit the fallacy of begging the question. The same scholar who raises historical doubts on the basis of the genre of a passage categorized the passage as belonging to that genre to begin with.

The Presumption of Historicity

The traditional method of historical-grammatical analysis demanded by ICBI as part of its inerrancy statement (Article XVIII), presumes that a narrative text is historical. The new historiographical approach does not.⁵⁹ According to Licona, we approach the Gospel narratives in neutral with regard to their historicity. That is, we do not know in advance what the writer intended to say in this narrative regarding its historicity.⁶⁰ We can only determine this after we have decided the genre categories outside the Gospels. Thus, when we look at the Gospels, they seem to fit best into the Greco-Roman biography category (which allows for legend and errors), then we can determine what is history and what is legend.⁶¹

⁵⁹ <http://commonsenseatheism.com/?p=261>.

⁶⁰ Licona, *Resurrection*, 97-99.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 34, 306, 552-53.

However, this is contrary to the traditional historical-grammatical method which presumes that a narrative is historical, until proven otherwise. As the ICBI framers put it, “We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which **present themselves as factual.**” Then it goes on to affirm that it is wrong to take such texts and pronounce them a myth or allegory, noting, that “Some, for instance, take Adam to be a myth, whereas in **Scripture he is presented as a real person.** Others take Jonah to be an allegory **when he is presented as a historical person** and [is] so referred to by Christ” (EH Article XIII, emphasis added). As a member of the drafting committee, I [Norman Geisler] can verify that we explicitly had in mind also Robert Gundry (who was later let go from the ETS over this issue) when he denied the historicity of certain sections of Matthew on similar grounds to those used by Mike Licona.⁶²

But just how does the TA justify its presumption of historicity in a narrative or how do we determine that they “present themselves as factual”? The answer lies in the nature of the historical-grammatical method. It is often called the “literal method” of interpretation, though appropriate qualifications (such as that it does not exclude figures of speech, etc.) are taken into account. The Latin title is *sensus literalis*.⁶³ The basic or true sense of any statement is the literal sense. As it has been put popularly, “If the literal sense makes good sense, then seek no other sense, lest it result in nonsense.” But from where do we get this presumption of literalness? The answer is: from the very nature of communication itself—of which language is the medium. The fact is, that communication is not possible without the assumption of literalness. Indeed, life itself as we know it would not be possible without this presumption. Consider for a moment, whether life would be possible if we did not presume that traffic signs convey literal meaning. The same is true of everything from labels on food and common conversations to courtroom procedures. Of course, figures of speech and symbols are used in literal communication, but the truth that is communicated is a literal truth. A figure of speech without an underlying literal core of meaning that is shared by those engaged in communication cannot convey any meaning.⁶⁴ For instance, Jesus said Lazarus was “sleeping” when he was actually dead (Jn. 11:11-14). This is an appropriate figure of speech of a

⁶² <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/09/14/the-devil-is-in-the-details-biblical-inerrancy-and-the-licona-controversy/>.

⁶³ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Single Meaning, Unified Referents,” in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.

⁶⁴ See Paul Edwards, “Professor Tillich’s Confusions” *Mind* 94 (April 1965):197-206, for a good exposition on the futility of “irreducible metaphors.”

literal event—death. However, this is significantly different from the claim that death is not a literal event of which we can use appropriate figures of speech or symbols.

Now the basis for taking things literally in common communication applies not only to the present but also to the past. When statements are made about the past, we assume them to refer to literal events, unless there is good reason to think otherwise by the biblical text, its context, or other biblical texts. So, the **historical**-grammatical method by its very name and nature has the presumption of historicity when used of the past. So, when the Gospel narrative declares that Jesus rose from the dead (Mt. 27:53), then we presume this is historical. Likewise, when the same chapter (Mt. 27:50-54) says that some saints were resurrected “after his [Jesus’] resurrection,” then we presume (unless proven to the contrary by biblical context), that this statement is referring to a literal resurrection as well. Thus, the burden of proof rests on those who “dehistoricize” this or any like narrative. Further, once we examine the text, its context, and other biblical text, we see: (a) there is no evidence in the text to the contrary, and (b) there is strong evidence in the text and context that the presumption of historicity is justified.⁶⁵

Indeed, there are multiple lines of evidence to confirm the historicity of the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27, including the following:⁶⁶ (1) This passage is a part of a historical narrative in a historical record—the Gospel of Matthew. Both the specific context (the crucifixion and resurrection narrative) and the larger setting (the Gospel of Matthew) demand the presumption of historicity, unless there is strong evidence to the contrary in the text, its context, or in other Scripture—which there is not. (2) This text manifests no literary signs of being poetic or legendary, such as those found in parables, poems, or symbolic presentations. Hence, it should be taken in the sense in which it presents itself, namely, as factual history. (3) This passage gives no indication of being a legendary embellishment, but it is a short, simple, straight-forward account in the exact style one expects in a brief historical narrative. (4) This event occurs in the context of other important historical events—the death and

⁶⁵ See J. W. Wenham, “When Were the Saints Raised, A Note on the Punctuation of Matthew Matt. 27:51-53,” *JTS* 32/1 (April 1981) 150-152.

⁶⁶ See JETS latest article reviewing Licona’s book: Charles L. Quarles, “Review: *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach.*” By Michael R. Licona. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010, 718 pp., *JETS* 54/4 (December 2011) 839-844.

resurrection of Christ—and there is no indication that it is an insertion foreign to the text. To the contrary, the repeated use of “and” shows its integral connection to the other historical events surrounding the report. (5) The resurrection of these saints is presented as the *result* of the physical historical resurrection of Christ. For these saints were resurrected only “after” Jesus was resurrected and as a result of it (Matt 27:53) since Jesus is the “firstfruits” of the dead (1Cor 15:20). It makes no sense to claim that a legend emerged as the immediate result of Jesus’ physical resurrection. Nor would it have been helpful to the cause of early Christians in defending the literal resurrection of Christ for them to incorporate legends, myths, or apocalyptic events alongside His actual resurrection in the inspired text of Scripture.

In addition to this indication with the text, there are other reason for accepting the historicity of Matthew 27: (6) Early Fathers of the Christian Church, who were closer to this event, took it as historical, sometimes even including it as an apologetic argument for the resurrection of Christ (e.g., Irenaeus, *Fragments*, XXVIII; Origen, *Against Celsus*, Book II, Article XXXIII; Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, Chap. XIII). (7) The record has the same pattern as the historical records of Jesus’ physical and historical resurrection: (a) there were dead bodies; (b) they were buried in a tomb; (c) they were raised to life again; (d) they came out of the tomb and left it empty; (e) they appeared to many witnesses. (8) An overwhelming consensus of the great orthodox teachers of the Church for the past nearly two thousand years supports the view that this account should be read as a historical record, and, consequently, as reporting historical truth. Aquinas cited the Fathers with approval, saying, “It was a great thing to raise Lazarus after four days, much more was it that they who had long slept should now shew themselves alive; this is indeed a proof of the resurrection to come” (Chrysostom). And “As Lazarus rose from the dead, so also did many bodies of the saints rise again to shew forth the Lord’s resurrection” (Jerome).⁶⁷ (9) Modern objections to a straight-forward acceptance of this passage as a true historical narrative are based on a faulty hermeneutic, violating sound principles of interpretation. For example, they (a) make a presumptive identification of its genre, based on extra-biblical sources, rather than analyzing the text for its style, grammar, and content in its context; or, (b) they use events reported outside of the Bible to pass judgment on whether or not the biblical event is historical. (10) The faulty hermeneutic principles used in point #9 could be used, without any further justification, to deny other events in the gospels as historical. Since there is no hermeneutical criterion of “magnitude,” the same principles could also be used to

⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *The Gospel of Matthew XXVII* in *Catena Aurea (Commentary on the Four Gospels. Vol. I: St. Matthew, Part III)*, 964.

relegate events such as the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection of Christ to the realm of legend.

ICBI on Dehistoricizing the Gospel Record

Since there is both the presumptive confirmation of historicity in the Gospel narrative and abundant evidence in the text itself and early understandings of it, then it is understandable that *The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy* would speak to the contemporary trend to undermine the inerrancy of the Gospel record, such as, has once again been attempted by Mike Licona. In the process of defending the historicity of the resurrection of Christ he undermined the historicity of the very Gospel narrative which supports the historicity of the resurrection. This led Southern Baptist leader Dr. Al Mohler to declare: “Licona has not only **violated the inerrancy of Scripture**, but he has **blown a massive hole into his own masterful defense of the resurrection.**” Thus, “**Licona has handed the enemies of the resurrection of Jesus Christ a powerful weapon....**” (emphasis added).⁶⁸

The ICBI framers condemned what some evangelical scholars were doing in undermining the Gospel record and provided clear statements that condemn that kind of “dehistoricizing.” They wrote: “We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship” (Article XVIII). And in the official ICBI commentary on their inerrancy statement, they added, “It has been fashionable in certain quarters to maintain that the Bible is not normal history, but redemptive history with an accent on redemption. Theories have been established that would limit inspiration to the redemptive theme of redemptive history, allowing the historical dimension of redemptive history to be errant” (Sproul, EI, 36). “Though the Bible is indeed *redemptive* history, it is also redemptive *history*, and this means that the acts of salvation wrought by God actually occurred in the space-time world” (Sproul, EI, 37). In addition, ICBI unequivocally stated that “We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science” (Article XII).

⁶⁸ <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/09/14/the-devil-is-in-the-details-biblical-inerrancy-and-the-licona-controversy/>.

In addition to the ICBI statements (above) declaring that dehistoricizing the Gospels is a denial of inerrancy, there are several other reasons in support of our conclusion: (1) Affirming the historical truth of this text in Matthew 27 has been the overwhelming consensus of the great orthodox teachers of the Christian Church for the past nearly 2000 years. So, any denial of its historicity has virtually the whole weight of Christian history against it. (2) The largest organization of scholars in the world who affirm inerrancy, *The Evangelical Theological Society* (ETS), declared that views like this that dehistoricize the Gospel record are incompatible with inerrancy, and, hence, they asked a member (Robert Gundry) to resign by an overwhelming vote (in 1983) because he had denied the historicity of sections in Matthew. The only real difference to Licona's approach in Matthew 27 is the type of extra-biblical literature used—apocalyptic vs. midrash. (3) The official statements of the ICBI, the largest group of international scholars to formulate an extended statement on inerrancy, explicitly exclude views like this that “dehistoricize” Gospel narratives. As a member of the ICBI drafting committee, I [Norman Geisler] know for certain that views like Robert Gundry's were a specific target when we declared: “We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching...” (“Chicago Statement on Inerrancy,” Article XVIII), and “We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightfully be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual” (*Statement on Hermeneutics*, Article XIII). (4) The ETS has adopted the ICBI understanding of inerrancy as their guide in determining its meaning. And the ETS excluded a member who dehistoricized sections of the Gospel like this. And it was because of instances like this, where members redefine doctrinal statements to suit their own beliefs, that the International Society of Christian Apologetics (www.isca-apologetics.org) added this sentence: “This doctrine is understood as the one expressed by the Framers of the *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy* in its ‘Chicago Statement’ and as interpreted by the official ICBI Commentary on it.” (5) Neither the ETS nor ICBI, in their official statements and actions, have allowed divorcing hermeneutics from inerrancy by making the vacuous claim that one could hold to inerrancy regardless of the hermeneutical method he employed and the conclusions to which it leads, even if it dehistoricized the creation story, the death of Christ, or His resurrection. If they did, then they would no longer be an “Evangelical” theological society. (6) Statements from other ICBI framers and members confirm this relationship between hermeneutics and inerrancy. An ICBI framer and founder of the ICBI, RC Sproul wrote:

Inspiration without inerrancy is an empty term. Inerrancy without inspiration is unthinkable. The two are inseparably related. They may be distinguished

but not separated. So it is with hermeneutics. We can easily distinguish between the inspiration and interpretation of the Bible, but we cannot separate them. Anyone can confess a high view of the nature of Scripture but the ultimate test of one's view of Scripture is found in his method of interpreting it. A person's hermeneutic reveals his view of Scripture more clearly than does an exposition of his view.⁶⁹

In his book *Does Inerrancy Matter?* James Montgomery Boice cites John Feinberg stating: "Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their *original autographs* and *properly interpreted* will be shown to be wholly true in everything they teach, whether that teaching has to do with doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, or other disciplines of knowledge."⁷⁰

Dehistoricizing the Gospel Record is a Denial of Inerrancy

Licona and his defenders attempt to argue that the historicity of the Gospels is not a matter of inspiration (or inerrancy), but a matter of interpretation. But this move is unsuccessful for many reasons.

First, it is built on a serious misunderstanding about what inerrancy means, especially that of the ICBI, which Licona claims to support. The ICBI statements insist that the Bible does make true statements that "correspond to reality" and that the Bible is completely true (corresponds to reality) in everything it teaches and "touches," including all statements "about history and science." So, inerrancy does not simply apply to contentless statements (for which we can only know the meaning by adopting a modern form of biblical criticism). Rather, inerrancy as a doctrine covers the truthfulness of all that Scripture teaches, including its own inerrancy.

Second, without a connection between inerrancy and hermeneutics—the literal historical-grammatical hermeneutics—the claim of inerrancy would be totally empty or vacuous. It would amount to saying, "If the Bible makes any truth claim, then it is true, but inerrancy *per se* does not entail that the Bible makes any truth claim." But inerrancy is not an empty vacuous claim. It is a claim that the whole Bible makes truth-claims, and that it is true in all that it

⁶⁹ R. C. Sproul, "Biblical Interpretation and the Analogy of Faith," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*. Eds. Roger R. Nicole & J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 134.

⁷⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter?* (Oakland: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1977), 13, emphasis added.

affirms. And truth, as we have seen and as it is defined by ICBI, is what corresponds to reality. So, to affirm the Bible as completely true is to affirm that all it affirms about reality is actually true. Thus, when it affirms things about the past, it follows that they are historically true. This means that to deny their inerrancy is to deny their historicity. The ICBI statements are very clear on this matter. They emphatically declare that: “HOLY SCRIPTURE, BEING GOD’S OWN WORD, WRITTEN BY MEN PREPARED AND SUPERINTENDED BY HIS SPIRIT, IS OF INFALLIBLE DIVINE AUTHORITY **IN ALL MATTERS UPON WHICH IT TOUCHES** (“A SHORT STATEMENT, “NO. 2, EMPHASIS ADDED) “We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture” (ARTICLE XIII). “We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write” (ARTICLE IX). “We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science” (ARTICLE XII). “We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture” (ARTICLE XIII). So, inerrancy is not an empty claim. It claims that every affirmation (or denial) in the Bible is completely true, whether it is about theological, scientific or historical matters (emphasis added in above quotations).

Third, a complete disjunction between hermeneutics and inerrancy is an example of “Methodological Unorthodoxy” which we first exposed in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (JETS) in 1983, now easily accessible on our web site (www.normangeisler.net). (1) If Licona’s total separation of inerrancy and hermeneutic is true, then one could completely allegorize the Bible (say, like Mary Baker Eddy did)—denying the literal Virgin Birth, physical resurrection of Christ, and everything else—and still claim that they held to the inerrancy of the Bible. (2) Such a bifurcation of hermeneutics from inerrancy is empty, vacuous, and meaningless. It amounts to saying that the Bible is not teaching that anything is actually true. But neither the ETS nor ICBI, whose view of inerrancy was adopted as guidelines for understanding inerrancy, would agree with this contention, as the next point demonstrates.^{71 72}

⁷¹ Support for this conclusion comes from retired Wheaton Professor and ICBI signer Henri Blocher who speaks against totally separating interpretation from the inerrancy issue because “It is thus possible to talk of Scripture’s supreme authority, perfect trustworthiness, infallibility and inerrancy and to empty such talk of the full and exact meaning it should retain by the way one handles the text.” He adds, “I reject the suggestion that Matthew 27:52f should be read nonliterally, and I consider that it puts in

Fourth, the ICBI Chicago Statement on inerrancy includes a statement on the literal historical-grammatical hermeneutics. Article XVIII reads: “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis....” There are very good reasons for including this statement on hermeneutics in an evangelical inerrancy statement. For one thing, there would be no doctrine of inerrancy were it not for the historical-grammatical hermeneutic by which we derive inerrancy from Scripture. For another, the term “evangelical” implies a certain confessional standard on essential doctrines, including the inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, His atoning death, and his bodily resurrection. These doctrines expressed in the early Creeds of Christendom are

jeopardy the affirmation of biblical inerrancy which I resolutely uphold.” Blocher advocates a literal interpretation of the passage because the last words of verse 53 “sound as an emphatic claim of historical, factual, truthfulness with an intention akin to that of 1 Corinthians 15:6.” So, a nonliteral interpretation “seems rather to be motivated by the difficulty of believing the thing told and by an unconscious desire to conform to the critical views of non-evangelical scholarship.” He correctly notes that the pressure of non-evangelical scholarship weighs heavily on the work of evangelical scholars. Thus, the non-literal interpretation is not only an exegetical mistake, but “In effect, it modifies the way in which biblical inerrancy is affirmed. Contrary to the intention of those propounding it, it undermines the meaning of ‘inerrancy’ which we should, with utmost vigilance, preserve” Erin Roach, “Licona Appeals to J. I. Packer’s Approach” (*Baptist Press*, Nov. 9, 2011), n.p.

⁷² Packer argued against Licona like positions in *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* pg 166-68 claiming: “Faith is rooted in the realization that the gospel is God’s word; and faith recognizes in its divine origin a full and sufficient guarantee of its veracity. So with Scripture, ‘God’s Word written’: faith rests its confidence in the truth of the biblical narratives, not on the critical acumen of the historian, but on the unfailing trustworthiness of God.”

In footnote 3 at the end of the paragraph on page 167 JI Packer states: “It should perhaps be emphasized that we do not mean by this that Scripture history is written according to the canons of modern scientific history. Biblical historians are not concerned to answer all the questions which modern historians ask, nor to tell their story with the detailed completeness to which the modern researcher aspires. It is no more possible to write a full history of Israel from the Old Testament documents than to write a complete biography of Christ from the four Gospels, or a full record of the expansion of Christianity during its first thirty years from Acts. The biblical writers had their own aims and interests guiding their selection of the evidence, and their own conventions for using it; and if we fail to take account of these things in interpreting what they wrote, we violate the canon of literal interpretation: cf. pp. 102 ff. above. Our point in the text is simply that, when Scripture professes to narrate fact, faith receives the narrative as factual on God’s authority, and does not conclude it to be legendary, or mythical, or mystical, or mere human authority.”

derived from Scripture by the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. Without it there would be no “evangelical” or “orthodox” creeds of beliefs in accord with them.⁷³

Inerrancy is Actually Inseparable from Interpretation

Inerrancy and the literal hermeneutic are formally distinct, but they are actually inseparable. Failure to make this distinction has led some to the false conclusion that any time one changes his interpretation on a given passage of Scripture, he has thereby denied inerrancy since opposing interpretations cannot both be true. However, this is based on the false assumption that what is actually inseparable is identical. Siamese twins with two heads and only one heart are inseparable but not identical. Apart from death, our soul and body are inseparable, but they are not identical. Hence, the charge that inerrancy and hermeneutics are identical is absurd. ICBI did not suppose that inerrancy and hermeneutics were formally identical, only that they were actually inseparable. So, when one changes his interpretation from a false one to a true one, the truth of the Bible does not change. All that changes is his interpretation of that text. Truth does not change when our understanding of it changes. The Bible remains inerrant when our interpretations are not. In short, there is an overlap between inerrancy and hermeneutics because inerrancy is not an empty (vacuous) claim. It is a claim that involves the assertion that an inspired Bible is actually true in all that it affirms. And this truth corresponds literally to the reality about which it speaks. Thus, inerrancy is not claiming that “If the Bible is making a truth claim, then that truth claim must be true.” Rather, inerrancy claims that that “The Bible is making truth claims, and they are all true.” Since truth is what corresponds to reality, to say the Bible is inerrant is to say that all of its claims correspond to reality.⁷⁴

⁷³ See: *Four Views on The Spectrums of Evangelicalism*, eds. Stanley Gundry, Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

⁷⁴ RC Sproul once said, “[T]he confession [of biblical inerrancy] rests its confidence on the integrity of God. On numerous occasions I have queried several Biblical and theological scholars in the following manner. –“Do you maintain the inerrancy of Scripture?” –“No”–“Do you believe the Bible to be inspired of God?”–“Yes”–“Do you think God inspires error?”–“No”–“Is all of the Bible inspired by God?”–“Yes”–“Is the Bible errant?”–“No”–“Is it inerrant?”–“No!”– At that point I usually acquire an Excedrin headache.” See: John Warwick Montgomery, *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1974), 257.

Finally, to retreat to the unknown and *unexpressed* “intentions” of the author behind the text, as opposed to the *expressed intentions* in the text, can be little more than a cover for one’s unorthodox beliefs. This assumption that we do not know the author’s intentions expressed in the biblical text, but must seek to find them by some extra-biblical text, is a capitulation to contemporary scholarship rather than submission to the ancient Lordship of the Savior who affirmed the imperishability (Mt. 5:17-18), final authority (Mt. 15:1-6), unbreakability (John 10:35), and inerrancy of Scripture (Mt. 22: 29; Jn. 17:17).

Conclusion

There are unorthodox methods and unorthodox messages. Unorthodox methodology leads to unorthodox theology. Many NT scholars,⁷⁵ including Mike Licona, have done both. In the final analysis that *with which* we think can be just as important, if not more, than that *about which* we think. As we have seen, The “New Historiographical Approach” of Mike Licona is an unorthodox methodology. And this unorthodox method led him to some unorthodox conclusions.

The tendency to migrate toward what is new is a dangerous tendency in contemporary biblical scholarship. It is based on a fallacious premise that claims, to use popular language, that “new is true” and implies “old is mold.” I [Norman Geisler] for one have found after 60 years of biblical studies that “Old is gold.” And I would urge that young evangelical scholars resist the Athenian tendency to “spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21).

⁷⁵ See Geisler and Roach, “Part Two: Recent Challenges to Inerrancy,” *Defending Inerrancy*, 45-211.