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The Spectrum of Inerrancy: An Exploration of David S. Dockery's Typological Contributions to the Inerrancy Debate in Evangelicalism

Abstract.

The present article explores the typological contributions to the inerrancy debate of David S. Dockery, the Chancellor of Trinity International University. Resulting from controversies in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) during the 1970s and 80s, Dockery provided a valuable typological framework for identifying a spectrum of positions in the inerrancy debate. Dockery's frameworks provide a helpful lens for understanding the complexity of inerrancy. Some positions are more conservative and deductivist, and other positions are more liberal and inductivist. These distinctions often create a barrier, a presuppositional divide, which is difficult to cross in a debate context. Dockery's variations provide a means of at least understanding the divide and the positions that differ from one's own. To that aim, I present Dockery's variations as a vital component for all attempts at dialogue in the inerrancy debate.

Keywords: evangelicalism, biblical inerrancy, David S. Dockery, biblical authority, hermeneutics

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Biblical inerrancy is a theological topic rife with differing and seemingly irreconcilable stances. Part of the issue arises with a given theologian's commitment to inductivism or deductivism – i.e. whether to formulate one's hermeneutic based on what Scripture says about itself and its authority (deductivism) or based on the phenomena of Scripture and the conclusions of scholarship (inductivism). Notwithstanding, there are many positions in between the deductivist and inductivist frameworks, and thus my goal here is to demonstrate the complexity of inerrancy and encourage its adherents and critics to adequately define and explain inerrancy and its variations. I illustrate this complexity by first discussing two typologies of inerrantists and then exploring the categories proposed by David S. Dockery (the Chancellor of Trinity International University) in two of his works: a brief article entitled *Biblical Inerrancy: Pro or Con?*, where Dockery describes four groups concerning the inerrancy debate, and an article entitled *Variations on Inerrancy*, where he describes nine different positions, illustrating a spectrum of convictions related to biblical authority (see Figure 2, page 2).

The nine positions described by Dockery are: (1) mechanical dictation, (2) absolute inerrancy, (3) critical inerrancy, (4) limited inerrancy, (5) qualified inerrancy, (6) nuanced inerrancy, (7) functional inerrancy, (8) inerrancy is irrelevant, and (9) biblical authority. The nine positions connect with Dockery's four groups – fundamentalists, evangelicals, moderates, and liberals. As we will see, fundamentalists and evangelicals are deductivists, virtually rejecting discoveries by researchers and critical scholars, and moderates and liberals are inductivists, accepting of new data and willing to adapt their theology as a result. Position 1 is a fundamentalist position, positions 2 and 3 are evangelical, positions 4–6 are moderate, and positions 8 and 9 are liberal. The dividing line between deductivism and inductivism complicates dialogue in the inerrancy debate. Communication failures occur from all sides, and their presuppositional commitments make it challenging to conduct meaningful dialogue. And thus my argument is that the complexity illustrated in Dockery's typological contributions should be used when engaging the inerrancy debate, no matter one's hermeneutical stance.

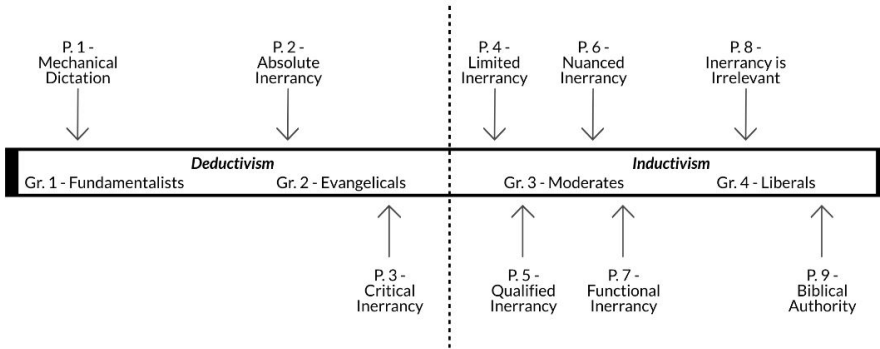


Figure 1. *The spectrum of inerrancy*

Typologies of Inerrancy

There are several typologies of inerrancy outside of Dockery’s groups and positions. In the 18th century, J. Paterson Smyth presented a typology through four roles associated with inerrancy, which for him surrounded the disquieting of Christian minds. Smyth’s four roles are the (1) disquieted thinker, (2) the secularist, (3) the biblical scholar, and (4) the orthodox controversialist.² The disquieted thinker is a believer disturbed by the secularist (critics of religion) and the biblical scholar.³ His or her disturbance is made worse by the orthodox controversialist, a staunch inerrantist enforcing the importance of biblical inerrancy.⁴ According to Smyth, some orthodox controversialists describe the disquieted thinker’s doubts as attacks from Satan to be warded off through prayer. Other orthodox controversialists “pleasantly slip out of the difficulties”⁵ of Scripture when faced with troublesome passages. Some ignore problematic passages and spend little time investigating the problematic elements of Scripture. To them, ques-

² SMYTH, J. Paterson (1892): *How God Inspired the Bible: Thoughts for the Present Disquiet*. London, Sampson Low, Marston & Co. Ltd. 5–7.

³ SMYTH 1892, 8.

⁴ Op. cit. 11–13.

⁵ Op. cit. 13.

tioning any part of the Bible, including its claims regarding science and history, is tantamount to questioning the entirety of Christianity. According to Smyth, this final form is “the chief cause of disquiet, and the chief cause of the discredit of the Bible”.⁶ Disquieted thinkers who may have otherwise passed through periods of doubting give up the faith entirely due to the orthodox controversialist’s unabashed certainty. These roles provide a glimpse of the early debates and typologies surrounding inerrancy when it was first defined and defended. However, inerrancy positions have since become far more nuanced and complicated, making Smyth’s roles somewhat outdated.

A more nuanced typology is given by Mark A. Noll, who discusses the relationship between evangelicals and critical scholarship in *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible in America*. He distinguishes between fundamentalists and evangelicals, with evangelicals being more open to critical scholarship than fundamentalists, who tend to be anti-intellectual.⁷ Noll acknowledges that despite shared theological commitments, there are many variations of evangelicals, especially with how they view critical scholarship and its conclusions. He describes two such variations: critical anti-criticism and believing criticism. Critical anti-critics maintain inerrancy and a high view of biblical authority. For them, critical scholarship should be studied to defend the Bible. Some critical anti-critics avoid secular critical scholarship almost entirely, focussing strictly on scholarship by like-minded believers.⁸ This perspective is highly deductive compared to the second major division, which Noll calls believing critics. These Christian scholars approach critical scholarship inductively. For them, data in history, archaeology, textual studies, and science can overturn accepted, traditional conclusions about the Bible. According to Noll, believing critics are not necessarily anti-inerrantists; some maintain inerrancy while accepting scholarly findings and adapting their theologies accordingly.⁹ However, I should note that there are several variations of critical anti-critics and believing critics, some of which I demonstrate through Dockery’s typological contributions.

⁶ Op. cit. 14.

⁷ NOLL, Mark A. (1986): *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*. Vancouver, Regent College Publishing. 154.

⁸ NOLL 1986, 156–158.

⁹ Op. cit. 158.

David S. Dockery and Variations on Inerrancy

In the 1970s, debates surrounding inerrancy intensified in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and throughout evangelicalism in general. In 1978, many evangelical leaders drafted the influential Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter CSBI), thereby galvanizing inerrantists. Despite the CSBI and efforts of inerrantist evangelicals, there were many diverging forms of inerrancy and many positions within the debate, and the SBC did not take an official stance regarding the debate until 1979, during the Houston Convention, where the controversy over inerrancy came to a seeming conclusion. During and after this controversy, Dockery proposed nine variations and four different groups related to the debate, representing the nuance and complexity that developed throughout evangelicalism during the 20th century.¹⁰

The four groups described in Dockery's *Biblical Inerrancy: Pro or Con?*¹¹ are fundamentalists, evangelicals, moderates, and liberals. After briefly describing each of these groups, I turn to Dockery's article *Variations on Inerrancy*, written for the magazine *SBC Today* in May 1986.¹² I reference examples of each position, some of which are provided by Dockery and others of which are taken from my own research; however, I go more in depth than does Dockery since he only mentions the names of examples without describing how or why they exemplify the given position. I should also note that, like all typologies, Dockery's groups and positions are not without problems. Limited inerrancy, qualified inerrancy, nuanced inerrancy, and functional inerrancy are quite similar, and at times it is difficult to understand the distinctions described by Dockery. Ad-

¹⁰ For more on the controversy of inerrancy in the SBC, see DOCKERY, David S. (2005): The Crisis of Scripture in Southern Baptist Life: Reflections on the Past, Looking to the Future. In: *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*. 9, 1. 36–53.

¹¹ DOCKERY, David S. – WISE, Phillip D. (1988): Biblical Inerrancy: Pro or Con? In: *The Theological Educator*. 37. 15–44. Note that this article is split into two halves, one half written by Dockery and the other half written by Philip D. Wise. In my article, I only refer to the half written by Dockery.

¹² This article was compiled into a collection known as *Southern Baptist Convention Controversy Collection, 1980–1995*, which is currently held by the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee. The library was kind enough to send me a digital version of the article.

ditionally, the two anti-inerrantist positions proffered by Dockery exemplify the limitations of his variations since there are many forms of anti-inerrancy held by sincere evangelicals. Unfortunately, Dockery's *Variations on Inerrancy* is also relatively short, and thus his definitions are brief; yet Dockery's variations help problematize the inerrancy debate, and, fortunately, the examples provide a certain level of distinction where it is difficult to distinguish certain positions from others.

Group 1: Fundamentalists

Dockery begins with the far-right position – fundamentalists. By fundamentalism, Dockery is referencing the historical fundamentalist movement that developed in the late 19th and early 20th century in American Protestantism. This form of Protestantism is a defensive, militant, and reactionary form of evangelicalism that opposes liberal theology, communism, and left-wing evangelicalism. Fundamentalists typically adhere to the *fundamentals* of Christian theology, or what they perceive as the crucial doctrines in the Christian faith. Though there are variations on what fundamentalists consider the fundamentals of Christianity, Dockery provides the following: “1) the inerrancy of Scripture, 2) the deity of Christ, 3) the substitutionary atonement of Christ, 4) Christ's bodily resurrection, and 5) Christ's literal, imminent (now often viewed as premillennial) second coming”.¹³ Dockery also notes that many fundamentalists exhibit “characteristics of legalism, separatism and fighting spirits”.¹⁴

According to Dockery, the fundamentalist conception of Scripture de-emphasizes the role of the human authors. He says that their theology borders on mechanical dictation, a theory of inspiration where the writers acted merely as tools for God to write his word. For fundamentalists then, “Each sentence is dictated by God's Holy Spirit.”¹⁵ Moreover, fundamentalists “affirm the full and absolute inerrancy of Scripture which stresses not only the truthfulness of scripture but its precise accuracy as well”.¹⁶ Dockery then notes several characteristics of fundamentalist hermeneutics. According to him,

¹³ DOCKERY – WISE 1988, 17.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Op. cit. 18.

¹⁶ Ibid.

fundamentalists reject historical-critical methods and superimpose philosophical frameworks on Scripture, thereby reading the whole Bible “as a set of propositional statements”.¹⁷ To assuage supposed problem passages, fundamentalists employ harmonizations and appeal to the original autographs by relegating problem passages to copyist and textual deficiencies. Finally, fundamentalists stress “the overall unity of scripture” while virtually ignoring “the variety and development within the Bible”.¹⁸

Group 2: Evangelicals

Dockery defines evangelicals¹⁹ as distinct from fundamentalists. He locates evangelicalism as a recent movement in European and American Protestantism, shaped by Billy Graham, Carl Henry, Harold Ockenga, J. I. Packer, and John Stott.²⁰ Though separate from fundamentalism, evangelicalism is itself a form of conservative Protestantism, influenced by the Puritans and the two Great Awakenings in America. Dockery states that “contemporary evangelicalism believes in the inerrant word of God, the deity of Christ and the necessity of faith in the person and atoning work of Christ for the salvation of men and women”.²¹ While fundamentalist beliefs are similar, evangelicalism differentiates itself by breaking from the fundamentalist traits of “separatism, legalism, social unconcern and anti-intellectualism”.²²

Evangelical doctrines of Scripture are also distinct from fundamentalism. Evangelicals argue “that revelation is both personal and propositional”.²³ They also realize

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Evangelicals” in this context does not refer to evangelicalism in general as described in typological frameworks, such as that of the Bebbington Quadrilateral, but rather to a specific group within evangelicalism that has its own unique conceptions of biblical authority, inspiration, and inerrancy as defined by Dockery. For more on the Bebbington quadrilateral, see BEBBINGTON, D. W. (1989): *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. Abingdon, Routledge.

²⁰ DOCKERY – WISE 1988, 18.

²¹ Op. cit. 19.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

that there are distinctive forms and genres in Scripture, noting passages that are not propositional. According to Dockery, “This recognition of literary diversity brings a healthy realization of the human aspect in Scripture, thus balancing the divine–human authorship of the Bible.”²⁴ For evangelicals, inspiration is typically defined as *concurrent*, meaning that both human and divine authorship played a role in the Bible’s composition. Their theologies of Scripture are also distinct from fundamentalism since evangelicals typically reject mechanical dictation. Dockery says that for evangelicals “meaning is at the sentence level and beyond” rather than at the word-for-word level of many fundamentalists.²⁵ What is most important for evangelicals is that Scripture is inerrant in all its claims. Like fundamentalists, they employ harmonizations to defend the Bible’s inerrancy; but, unlike fundamentalists, their use of harmonizations is not “at the expense of running roughshod over the context and forcing the Bible to say what it does not say”.²⁶ Evangelicals are also willing to use historical-critical methods so long as they are “employed with care and faith-oriented presuppositions”.²⁷

Group 3: Moderates

The third group, moderates, is found within various theological strands and traditions, including “neo-evangelicalism, neo-orthodoxy, and neo-liberalism as well as the new aesthetic and narrative theologies”.²⁸ Dockery notes that moderates may or may not adhere to biblical inerrancy, and they follow theologians such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. Their theologies of Scripture, however, lean more towards infallibility than towards inerrancy. If inerrancy is adhered to at all, it is usually applied strictly towards doctrine and not matters of history or science. Moderates share a dynamic view of inspiration, placing equal importance on the roles of the divine and human authors, not shying away from the role of each authors’ distinctive personalities. Moderates accept

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Op. cit. 20.

the biblical studies concepts of redactors and interpretive communities concerning the Bible's composition. What is central for most moderates is Scripture's function – the salvation of humanity.²⁹ Dockery concludes that "Scripture is thus understood as a functional and living instrument serving God for the proclamation of the salvation message to its readers."³⁰

Group 4: Liberals

Dockery describes the fourth group, liberals, as distinct from the classical understanding of liberalism.³¹ Instead, the focus of liberalism is on "existentialism, process thought, and some liberation and feminist theologies".³² Dockery also notes the seeming impossibility of characterizing "a view of scripture among these diverse theologies".³³ However, in contrast to fundamentalists who emphasize the divine aspect of Scripture, liberals de-emphasize the Bible's divinity and emphasize its humanity. Liberals describe inspiration as an act of the Holy Spirit, who raised the human authors' imaginations and spirits so that they might "express themselves creatively".³⁴ Dockery concludes that liberals read the Bible subjectively and dismiss objective approaches and readings of Scripture.³⁵

²⁹ Op. cit. 20–21.

³⁰ Op. cit. 21.

³¹ According to the *Encyclopedia of Politics*, classical liberalism refers to a specific "political and economic school of thought". This school of thought was based on the assumed rationality and individuality of human beings and the creation of a social contract with the government and other members of society. This unwritten contract includes the unassailable and natural rights of every person for "life, liberty, and the right to own property". PURDY, Elizabeth (2005): "Liberalism" in the Left. In: CARLISLE, Rodney P. (ed.): *Encyclopedia of Politics*. Thousand Oaks, SAGE Reference, Volume 1. 278–281.

³² DOCKERY – WISE 1988, 21.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Group Dynamics

It would be helpful to briefly discuss how these groups relate to each other and differentiate between themselves. In defining these four groups, Dockery's primary concern is to explore the various sides of the inerrancy debate within the SBC. According to him, the SBC is comprised mostly of evangelicals and moderates and has very few fundamentalists and liberals. He further clarifies that conservative positions are found within the fundamentalist and evangelical groups, while more progressive positions are located within the moderates and liberals.³⁶ Moreover, Dockery claims that SBC fundamentalists are not as "separatistic as the rest of American fundamentalism", and SBC liberals are not as "radical as most of American liberalism".³⁷ These extremes complicate matters since positions on different sides tend to caricature and label their opponents according to the most extreme forms – in this case, liberalism and fundamentalism. According to Dockery, this misrepresentation occurs in all groups – fundamentalists, evangelicals, moderates, and liberals alike.³⁸

With an understanding of various typologies surrounding the inerrancy debate, we now turn to Dockery's *Variations on Inerrancy* to explore and discuss the different positions found within these groups. As noted for Dockery's groups, these positions do not and cannot fully represent the various positions in the debate, but they at least provide a way forward. In the end, what matters most is specificity. It is best to provide specific examples of an interlocutor's positions rather than to lump one's opponents into one generic strawman. To counter generalizations and misrepresentations, Dockery provides examples of key figures in each position.

Position 1: Mechanical Dictation

The first position is mechanical dictation. As mentioned earlier, mechanical dictation posits that God, as the actual author of Scripture, used the human authors merely as tools to convey his words. This position downplays human involvement in Scripture's

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Op. cit. 22.

composition, virtually ignoring the role of human personalities, writing styles, and historical contexts. Nonetheless, Dockery notes that for him the strength of this position is that it “gives proper credit to God as the author of the Bible”.³⁹

Scholars commonly use mechanical dictation to describe and critique inerrantists, yet very few evangelical scholars believe in mechanical inspiration. According to some inerrantists, such as J. I. Packer, mechanical dictation is entirely a strawman construction that has no basis in evangelicalism at all. He claims that “It is safe to say that no Protestant theologian, from the Reformation till now, has ever held [mechanical dictation theory]; and certainly modern Evangelicals do not hold it.”⁴⁰ Packer adds that when theologians employ the term “dictation”, it is usually figurative. He also claims that dictation describes the result of Scripture and not the “method or psychology of God’s guidance of [the human authors] ...”⁴¹ Regardless, Dockery provides at least one example of mechanical dictation, that of John R. Rice and his short text entitled *Our God-Breathed Book—The Bible*.⁴²

Rice’s views surprisingly correspond with mechanical dictation. He begins with firm statements regarding the authority of the Bible, claiming that God’s word is “more accurate than any scientific book in the world” and that “It is the only absolutely reliable book ever written...”⁴³ According to Rice, the nature of God’s inspiration is the reason for the Bible’s absolute perfection. For Rice, inspiration was total. God used writers to record his *exact* words. Rice provides several biblical passages to illustrate mechanical dictation, such as 2 Timothy 3:16, Luke 1:69–70, 2 Samuel 23:2, and Matthew 4:4. For example, Matthew 4:4 records Jesus’s response to Satan’s temptations in the wilderness,

³⁹ DOCKERY, David S. (1986): Variations on Inerrancy. *SBC Today*. The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Box 2, Folder 10, The Southern Baptist Convention Controversy Collection AR 812, 10.

⁴⁰ PACKER, J. I. (1970): *‘Fundamentalism’ and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles*. Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 79. Additionally, while not denying that some evangelicals believe in mechanical dictation, Dockery notes that mechanical dictation has often been mistakenly used as the primary definition of inerrantist theories of inspiration. See DOCKERY – WISE 1988, 22.

⁴¹ PACKER 1986, 79.

⁴² RICE, John R. (1958): *Our God Breathed Book—The Bible*. Murfreesboro, Sword of the Lord Publishers.

⁴³ RICE 1958, 3.

where Jesus tells Satan that Scripture comes from the mouth of God.⁴⁴ Rice then downplays the human authors' role even further by arguing that even their distinctive styles were the result of God's inspiration; it was God who inspired them to use their particular writing styles.⁴⁵ For Rice, inspiration is absolute, right down to the exact spelling of the biblical texts.⁴⁶ Ultimately, according to Rice, the role of the human authors "was to be simply the guided instruments in writing down exactly what God said to write".⁴⁷

Indeed, mechanical dictation is a rare position for inerrantists, yet Rice's example shows that it is a position taken by some, despite Packer's claim to the contrary. Nonetheless, Rice wrote *Our God-Breathed Book* in 1958, so there are possibly even fewer mechanical dictation adherents today. However, this strict fundamentalist position should nonetheless be explained and demonstrated as a marginal view in the inerrancy debate.

Position 2: Absolute Inerrancy

According to Dockery, position two affirms the Bible's truthfulness in all its claims, including those made concerning science and history. However, he notes that absolute inerrantists differentiate themselves from adherents of mechanical dictation by adopting a verbal-plenary theory of inspiration. This alternate theory attests to God's authorship of the Bible while accommodating the Bible's human authors. Regardless, Dockery claims that absolute inerrantists at times fail "to take seriously the human aspect of

⁴⁴ Op. cit. 5–6.

⁴⁵ Op. cit. 11. A few pages later, Rice uses 2 Corinthians 10:10, which makes a comment regarding Paul's weak bodily presence and speaking abilities, to claim that God is responsible for Paul's effective use of language in Paul's epistles, since Paul was apparently not a great speaker in person. Rice claims that: "Surely the difference was in divine inspiration, and in [Paul's] letters the words were God's words, the style was God's style." See Rice, 18. It is also worth noting the stark contrast between Rice's position and what would later be written down in the CSBI, which did not deny the influence of each author's personalities. See *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (CSBI). http://www.danielakin.com/wp-content/uploads/old/Resource_545/Book%202,%20Sec%2023.pdf (last accessed: 19 December 2019), Article VIII.

⁴⁶ Rice quotes from Matthew 5:17–18, arguing that God inspired every part of Scripture, even the exact spelling. See RICE 1958, 13.

⁴⁷ Op. cit. 15.

Scripture and its historical contexts in [their] attempt[s] to harmonize the apparent differences within the biblical text”.⁴⁸

Dockery provides Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible* as an example of this position. For Lindsell, inerrancy is “the most important theological topic of this age”.⁴⁹ Lindsell encourages evangelicals to make a firm stand regarding biblical inerrancy by convincing their churches and institutions to take rigid positions in the debate. He states that inerrancy concerns the foundational document of Christianity, and as such it deserves serious attention.⁵⁰

According to Lindsell, inspiration involves an “inward work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds” of the human authors.⁵¹ Further, the result of inspiration is that the Bible is inerrant in its original autographs. Lindsell notes that biblical authors may have erred in life, but they could not err in writing Scripture. He argues that biblical authors “were preserved from making factual, historical, scientific, or other errors”.⁵² For Lindsell, Scripture is true in all its claims. Even though Scripture is not primarily a textbook for science and history, it does not err when it makes claims concerning such matters. Inspiration, for Lindsell, affected every word chosen by the human authors. Nevertheless, Lindsell affirms both the divine and human aspects of Scripture, arguing that the human authors “retained their own styles of writing and the Holy Spirit, operating within this human context, superintended the writing of the Word of God that the end product was God’s”.⁵³ Moreover, Lindsell argues that inspiration and inerrancy must be total, covering the entire Bible; otherwise, none of Scripture is inspired and inerrant.⁵⁴

Another example of absolute inerrancy is Packer in *‘Fundamentalism’ and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles*. According to Packer, God’s act of inspiration as described in 2 Timothy 3:16 makes him the actual author of Scripture. Still, Packer notes that inspiration did not “involve any obliterating or overriding of [the author’s] personality”.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ DOCKERY 1986, 10.

⁴⁹ LINDSELL, Harold (1976): *The Battle for the Bible*. Grand Rapids, The Zondervan Corporation. 14.

⁵⁰ LINDSELL 1976, 15.

⁵¹ Op. cit. 30.

⁵² Op. cit. 31.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Op. cit. 32.

⁵⁵ PACKER 1986, 78.

Instead, God used the human authors' personalities and styles to convey his word in the way he desired it to be written.⁵⁶ For Packer, inspiration did not involve any altered states of mind or trances; God inspired the human authors through his providential orchestration.⁵⁷

I should further note that position two closely resembles the CSBI, which affirms absolute inerrancy for all of Scripture's claims. The CSBI also accommodates the human authors. Moreover, both Lindsell and Packer signed and supported the CSBI, along with hundreds of other influential evangelical leaders. In its opening statement, the document affirms that the Bible is "of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches..."⁵⁸ The Bible, according to the CSBI, is inerrant not only in its teaching and in matters of salvation but also in matters concerning "God's acts in creation... the events of world history... and its own literary origins under God".⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the CSBI affirms that inspiration did not override the personalities of the human authors; according to the CSBI, God "utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared".⁶⁰

Position 3: Critical Inerrancy

Position three is similar to absolute inerrancy, yet with its own distinctions. Like absolute inerrancy, this position views the Bible as true in all its claims; however, it recognizes that there are distinctive claims intended by the biblical authors. Historical texts are not scientific texts, and theological treatises are not scientific or historical. According to Dockery, critical inerrantists do not "seek to harmonize every detail of Scripture", resulting from their recognition that each author had "different purposes".⁶¹ Critical inerrantists also use and accept critical methodologies, such as form criticism and

⁵⁶ This position is also found in Article VIII of the CSBI. See CSBI, Article VIII.

⁵⁷ PACKER 1986, 78; this view of inspiration is also found in Article VII of the CSBI, which denies "that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind". Instead, Article VII presents inerrancy as "largely a mystery..." See CSBI, Article VII.

⁵⁸ Op. cit. 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Op. cit. Article VIII.

⁶¹ DOCKERY 1986, 10.

redaction criticism, but they nevertheless defend the Bible by regarding scientific claims as phenomenological. They also argue that the Bible's historical claims are "faithful representations of the way events described took place, although the accuracy is understood in general and not precise terms".⁶²

Dockery lists Roger Nicole, J. Ramsey Michaels, D. A. Carson, and John Woodbridge as critical inerrantists. In the preface of the edited volume *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, Woodbridge asserts the trustworthiness of biblical narratives, claiming that they "correspond to what happened in real time and in real places".⁶³ Woodbridge is critical of theological proposals like those presented by Kenton Sparks in *God's Word in Human Words*. Sparks believes that inerrancy is an incorrect approach towards Scripture and that evangelicals should embrace the fact that Scripture contains errors and should not allow this fact to hinder their faith. For Woodbridge, positions like Sparks's should be opposed. According to him, Sparks's view of accommodation is false since, for Sparks, God accommodated his message to the faulty worldviews of biblical authors. Woodbridge argues that this form of accommodation is counter to Christian history, and Woodbridge lists Augustine as an example of an allegedly biblical form of accommodation.⁶⁴ In this alternate and supposedly biblical form, God accommodated himself to believers' "weaknesses", particularly concerning their mistaken understandings of the Bible. Woodbridge claims that "Scripture is written in the language of appearance—the way we see things to be."⁶⁵

D. A. Carson is another prominent critical inerrantist. He is a biblical scholar of the New Testament, whereas John Woodbridge is an evangelical scholar of church history. As such, Carson is no stranger to critical methodologies. If an inerrantist engages in biblical studies while maintaining their convictions, critical inerrancy allows this type of combination. This combination is why the position is called *critical inerrancy*; adherents believe

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ WOODBRIDGE, John D. (2012): Preface. In: HOFFMEIER, James K. – MAGARY, Dennis R. (eds.): *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*. Wheaton, Crossway. 13.

⁶⁴ WOODBRIDGE 2012, 13–16.

⁶⁵ Op. cit. 16.

in a variation of inerrancy that allows critical methodologies to a certain extent. In Carson's case, he uses form, source, tradition, and even redaction criticism.⁶⁶ The critical inerrantist adopts methods so long as they do not challenge biblical inerrancy.

In *Biblical Inerrancy: Pro or Con?*, Dockery provides his own definition of inerrancy. Dockery affirms both the human and divine aspects of the Bible and its inspiration. He also insists that God's inspiration did not override the human authors' personalities and styles.⁶⁷ He then argues that Christians should study the Bible as a literary document; for him, to deny this is to "treat the Bible as less than human, less than historical and less than literature".⁶⁸ He further argues that critical methodologies are limited and should be approached and practised "from the viewpoint of faith in the trustworthiness of the biblical text..."⁶⁹ Thus, according to Dockery: "Inerrancy means when all the facts are known, the Bible (in its autographs) properly interpreted in light of which culture and communication means had developed by the time of its composition will be shown to be completely true (and therefore not false) in all that it affirms, to the degree of precision intended by the author, in all matters relating to God and his creation."⁷⁰

This definition goes beyond the ethereal notion of original autographs by arguing that inerrancy will only be proven in the *future*. In other words, inerrancy cannot presently be established, yet, according to Dockery, Christians should believe it as a statement of faith regarding the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Though critical scholarship cannot argue against an affirmation like this, Dockery's definition of inerrancy creates an opportunity for conservative evangelical scholars to honestly approach critical scholarship while maintaining faith in the inerrancy of the Bible. Thus, compared to adherents of mechanical dictation and absolute inerrantists, critical inerrantists are at least willing to study critical scholarship.

⁶⁶ For an example of Carson's work in biblical studies, see his commentary on the *Gospel of John*. CARSON, D. A. (1991): *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁶⁷ DOCKERY, David S. – WISE, Phillip D. 1988, 23.

⁶⁸ Op. cit. 24.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Op. cit. 25.

Position 4: Limited Inerrancy

According to Dockery, limited inerrancy⁷¹ portrays the Bible as inerrant only in matters of faith, salvation, ethics, and “matters which can be empirically validated”.⁷² In terms of inspiration, limited inerrantists do not believe that God “raised the writers to an intellectual level above that of their contemporaries”.⁷³ In other words, God did not inhibit the writers from making errors related to science and history. What matters most for limited inerrantists is the inerrancy of salvation, faith, and ethics.⁷⁴

Dockery offers the example of I. Howard Marshall and his text *Biblical Inspiration*. Marshall describes the Bible as a book filled with “apparent contradictions between what is said in different parts”.⁷⁵ Marshall also notes that the four Gospels portray Jesus differently. He further states that differences among Leviticus, Proverbs, and Philippians cause some people to conclude that these texts are “documents from three rather different religions”.⁷⁶ According to Howard, a responsible believer weighs such problems; the interpreter “must face up to [the problems] honestly”.⁷⁷ Howard is seemingly comfortable with problematic passages and still able to view the Bible as divinely inspired.⁷⁸ What is vital for Howard is that God be represented as a personal God who deals directly with human beings.⁷⁹ Referring to 2 Timothy 3:15, Howard argues that the “stated purpose of the Scriptures is to provide the instruction that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”.⁸⁰

⁷¹ According to Stephen T. Davis, advocates of “full inerrancy” (which is close to Dockery’s position two, absolute inerrancy) use the term “limited inerrancy” in a pejorative sense so as to denigrate those who reject the complete inerrancy of Scripture. See DAVIS, Stephen T. (1977): *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press. 29.

⁷² DOCKERY 1986, 10.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ MARSHALL, I. Howard (1982): *Biblical Inspiration*. London, Hodder & Stoughton Limited (reprint: Vancouver, Regent College Publishing, 2004). 16.

⁷⁶ MARSHALL 1982, 16.

⁷⁷ Op. cit. 17.

⁷⁸ Op. cit. 13.

⁷⁹ Op. cit. 33.

⁸⁰ Op. cit. 53.

In *The Battle for the Bible*, Lindsell adamantly opposes limited inerrancy, arguing that as a term it is “meaningless”.⁸¹ He claims that denying complete inerrancy portrays the Bible as just another book filled with truthful and fallible information. He further argues that limited inerrancy forces readers to determine which parts are correct and which are false, and such a process judges God’s Word with an outside source. For Lindsell, this cannot happen; nothing outside of God himself can judge the Bible.⁸² Lindsell also claims that conceding inerrancy leads to other concessions and does not stop until the believer has reached full-blown “heresy”.⁸³

Position 5: Qualified Inerrancy

According to Dockery, qualified inerrancy is similar to limited inerrancy. He distinguishes between the two positions in their “philosophical starting points”.⁸⁴ Dockery notes that limited inerrantists view inerrancy through an empirical framework, while qualified inerrantists view inerrancy as a faith commitment. Qualified inerrantists do not deny errors within the Bible, at least when Scripture is studied inductively; but for them the Bible’s veracity is maintained through a presupposition of faith. Dockery notes that this position is difficult to articulate “since it is a tension-filled [position]”.⁸⁵ Dockery also notes that qualified inerrantists seek to balance their commitment to both the human and divine aspects of Scripture. Perhaps this balance is what Dockery sees as creating tension.

Dockery provides Donald Bloesch as an example of qualified inerrancy, which, like limited inerrancy, focusses on the purpose of divine inspiration – to lead humanity to salvation in Christ and “to equip the people of God to bear witness to their faith...”⁸⁶ He further argues that Scripture does not give “exact knowledge of mathematics or biology or any other science”, and neither does it accord with contemporary history standards.⁸⁷ For

⁸¹ LINDSELL 1977, 203.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Op. cit. 204.

⁸⁴ DOCKERY 1986, 10.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ BLOESCH, Donald G. (1980): *The Sword of the Spirit: The Meaning of Inspiration*. In: *Themelios*. 5, 3. 14.

⁸⁷ BLOESCH 1980, 14.

Bloesch, the Bible's inerrancy pertains strictly to the Holy Spirit's teachings, along with matters of faith and salvation.⁸⁸ But these truths require "spiritual discernment" to truly comprehend them.⁸⁹ And the believer must search out the Bible's truths, requiring divine illumination; the Bible's truths are not evident in and of themselves but only when seen through the lens of faith.⁹⁰ Bloesch notes that biblical interpretation is "a work of faith..."⁹¹ For him, Christians must not examine the Bible based on external sources. He states that the Bible is not persuasive because of its "logical force or rational coherence", a statement that distinguishes Bloesch from limited inerrantists who often argue – according to Dockery – for the Bible's limited inerrancy not as a statement of faith but as a statement of fact.⁹²

Position 6: Nuanced Inerrancy

Nuanced inerrancy, according to Dockery, applies inerrancy differently depending on the given biblical text, which is where the term nuanced inerrancy derives its meaning. For example, nuanced inerrantists apply mechanical dictation to certain parts of Scripture, such as the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2–17; Deuteronomy 5:6–17). In other cases, such as historical and epistolary literature, verbal inspiration⁹³ is applied. Further, in cases such as poetry, proverbs, and stories, a dynamic form of inspiration is more relevant, where the human authors are free to express themselves. In any case, for nuanced inerrantists, "one position of inspiration (and its corollary inerrancy viewpoint) is not adequate to deal with the various types of literature represented in the Bible".⁹⁴ However, Dockery notes that this position can be problematic due to the difficulty of determining which form of inspiration and inerrancy to apply to given biblical texts.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Op. cit. 15.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Op. cit. 16.

⁹¹ Op. cit. 15.

⁹² Op. cit. 16.

⁹³ According to Lindsell, verbal inspiration means that "inspiration extends to the words... as well as to the thoughts" of the human authors. See LINDSELL 1977, 33.

⁹⁴ DOCKERY 1986, 10.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Dockery offers the example of Clark Pinnock, who adheres to “spirit hermeneutics”, which discerns not just what “God said to people long ago in the scriptures, but what the Spirit is saying to the churches now.”⁹⁶ The Holy Spirit’s communication with present-day believers is dynamic and changes throughout history.⁹⁷ Pinnock discredits interpretation based on rational propositionalism, where interpreters examine the text in “cut-and-dried” terms while relying on prooftexts related to biblical inspiration; this reliance on prooftexts and forms of interpretation arises out of fear of falling into “uncontrolled subjectivity”.⁹⁸ For Pinnock, the prooftexts for inspiration cannot deal with every form, genre, and style of Scripture.⁹⁹ A better alternative is examining how Jesus and the Apostles interpreted Scripture and learning from their example.¹⁰⁰ Jesus did not consider every text binding, and neither did the Apostles.¹⁰¹ The Bible’s truth for Pinnock is “balanced and nuanced”.¹⁰² Taking this approach towards Scripture makes believers attentive to God’s dynamic and unique message for the present-day church.

Moreover, the Bible is a “record of a developing historical revelation” and is thus conducive to dynamic interpretations.¹⁰³ This approach enables Pinnock to contextualize specific problem texts such as those that support slavery or denigrate women. Since Scripture is dynamic, and the Holy Spirit communicates anew to the church, Christians can relegate problematic passages to an ancient culture and era.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ PINNOCK, Clark H. (2009): The Work of the Spirit in the Interpretation of Holy Scripture from the Perspective of a Charismatic Biblical Theologian. *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*. 18, 2. 158.

⁹⁷ PINNOCK 2009, 162.

⁹⁸ Op. cit. 158.

⁹⁹ Pinnock notes that 2 Timothy 3:15–16 “says nothing about inerrancy”. Instead, it focusses on “the practical benefits which the scriptures offer”. Likewise, 2 Peter 1:20–21 presents prophecies as dictated by God, yet it says nothing concerning the non-prophetic passages of the Bible. Moreover, Pinnock argues that other prooftexts, such as John 10:35 and Matthew 5:17, are similarly ambiguous when compared to our supposedly firm doctrines of Scripture. For example, though Jesus says that nothing will be removed from the law until everything is fulfilled, Jesus himself disregards certain laws from the Hebrew Bible, creating a tension with the intended meaning of Matthew 5:17. See op. cit. 159.

¹⁰⁰ Op. cit. 158–159.

¹⁰¹ Op. cit. 160.

¹⁰² Op. cit. 161.

¹⁰³ Op. cit. 165.

¹⁰⁴ Op. cit. 167. Pinnock notes, however, that this hermeneutic does not mean that Christians adapt the Bible to their culture; instead, Pinnock advocates Christians to read contemporary context and reality in the light of the Bible. See op. cit. 170.

Position 7: Functional Inerrancy

Functional inerrancy exemplifies one difficulty with Dockery's variations. According to Dockery, functional inerrantists are primarily concerned with Scripture's function – that of leading believers to salvation and helping them grow in godliness. For functional inerrantists, Scripture's inerrancy relates to its purpose. Dockery then notes that functional inerrancy generally "refuses to relate inerrancy to matters of factuality".¹⁰⁵ This viewpoint is comparable to both limited inerrancy and qualified inerrancy. Yet, whereas Dockery distinguishes between limited inerrancy and qualified inerrancy, he does not provide an exact distinguishing factor for functional inerrantists. Nevertheless, functional inerrancy appears to be characterized by its view that function need not include matters of ethics and morality. For functional inerrantists, Scripture's function is purely salvific.

Dockery provides G. C. Berkouwer, Jack Rogers, and Donald McKim as functional inerrantists. Beginning with Berkouwer, faith in Scripture is "connected with the testimony of the Holy Spirit".¹⁰⁶ For Berkouwer, faith and Scripture's message are intrinsically connected.¹⁰⁷ Berkouwer discusses pneumatic exegesis, where the interpreter has direct access to the Holy Spirit speaking through the text, which distinguishes their interpretation from those of critical scholars.¹⁰⁸ Berkouwer notes that "The message of salvation comes... in meaningful human language."¹⁰⁹ God has chosen the human language as the vessel of his salvific work through the Bible. Berkouwer also notes that God composed Scripture in the same way that any book is composed, and thus the same hermeneutical principles applied to all texts are just as applicable to the Bible.¹¹⁰ In this sense, biblical scholars' work is of great value; however, according to Berkouwer, historical-critical methods are limited to the meaning intended by the human authors and not the meaning intended by God. Understanding God's intended meaning requires something more than hermeneutical methods.¹¹¹ God's intended meaning for Berkouwer relates strictly to salvation.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ DOCKERY 1986, 10.

¹⁰⁶ BERKOUWER, G. C. (1975): *Holy Scripture*. Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 105.

¹⁰⁷ BERKOUWER 1975, 106.

¹⁰⁸ Op. cit. 111.

¹⁰⁹ Op. cit. 112.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Op. cit. 113.

¹¹² Op. cit. 125.

Berkouwer then discusses the work of Herman Bavinck, who argued that we should not expect the Bible to have scientific exactitude, and the same is true of biblical historiography, which at times is symbolic and not literal.¹¹³ Ultimately, Berkouwer sees Scripture's truthfulness as related to its purpose "for teaching, for reproof, for correction..."¹¹⁴

In *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, Jack Rogers and Donald McKim provide another example of functional inerrancy. They argue that Charles Hodge's depiction of inspiration and biblical authority is antithetical to John Calvin and historic Reformed theology. According to them, Calvin relegated Scripture's veracity to its salvific function. God accommodated himself to the cultural and historical contexts of the human authors, and what mattered was the proper communication of the Gospel and not the correct conveyance of historical and scientific minutiae.¹¹⁵ Rogers and McKim argue that the church's historical position has been that "The function, or purpose, of the Bible was to bring people into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ."¹¹⁶ This function was then distorted by Princeton theology and its conception of biblical authority, beginning with Francis Turretin and his foundational systematic theology textbook, which was later adopted and used in Princeton Theological Seminary. According to Rogers and McKim, Charles Hodge and his successors further developed this form of biblical authority that has since spread throughout much of evangelicalism.¹¹⁷

Position 8: Inerrancy is Irrelevant

Position eight is essentially an anti-inerrancy position. Dockery calls this position "inerrancy is irrelevant". For adherents of this position, the inerrancy debate distracts from "serious biblical research".¹¹⁸ They also see inerrancy as causing disunity, where proponents

¹¹³ Berkouwer notes that this interpretation must be shielded from arbitrariness and relativity through what he calls a "levelling view", where interpreters judge Scripture through Scripture itself or interpret one passage based on other passages. See *op. cit.* 126–127.

¹¹⁴ *Op. cit.* 140.

¹¹⁵ ROGERS, Jack – MCKIM, Donald (1999): *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*. Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers. xvii.

¹¹⁶ ROGERS – MCKIM 1999, xxii.

¹¹⁷ *Op. cit.* xvii–xxiii.

¹¹⁸ DOCKERY 1986, 11.

of various positions argue about minor details. According to Dockery, the problem with this position is its failure to recognize biblical authority's foundational importance.¹¹⁹

Dockery provides David A. Hubbard as an example. Hubbard contributes to an edited volume entitled *Biblical Authority*, which was edited by Jack Rogers. Hubbard's article is called *The Current Tensions: Is There a Way Out?* In a separate piece, Hubbard discusses his motivation and purpose in contributing to Rogers's edited volume, which was to encourage evangelicals to unite over their "orthodox heritage".¹²⁰ As a former faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary, Hubbard was present during the inerrancy tensions at that institution during the 1960s and 70s, when several faculty members, such as Harold Lindsell, were vying to create strict doctrinal expectations related to inerrancy. As such, Hubbard has experienced first hand the disunity that inerrancy can cause. For Hubbard, evangelicalism and inerrancy are not "synonymous".¹²¹ It is far more essential to determine how to interpret Scripture than it is to determine what Scripture is.¹²²

Peter Enns has also demonstrated this position in his recent works, notably in his contribution to *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*. His chapter is entitled *Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does*.¹²³ Enns's views have changed throughout his career, but currently his views appear more like position eight of Dockery's variations.¹²⁴ In his contribution to *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, Enns argues that inerrancy cannot "capture the Bible's varied character and complex dynamics".¹²⁵ Still, Christians must grapple with the phenomena of Scripture and accommodate their

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ HUBBARD, David A. (1993): Evangelicals and Biblical Scholarship, 1945–1992: An Anecdotal Commentary. *Bulletin for Biblical Research*. 3. 9.

¹²¹ HUBBARD 1993, 9. This contrasts with the position of Lindsell, who firmly believes that inerrancy is a core component of evangelicalism itself. See LINDSELL 1977, 138–140.

¹²² HUBBARD 1993, 10.

¹²³ ENNS, Peter (2013): Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does. In: Gundry, Stanley N. (ed.): *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan. 83–116.

¹²⁴ His text *Inspiration and Incarnation* was published in 2005. At the time, Enns's views resembled those of limited inerrancy and possibly functional inerrancy; however, his views have since changed and appear closer to position eight, inerrancy is irrelevant.

¹²⁵ ENNS 2013, 83.

theology accordingly.¹²⁶ For Enns, inerrancy is a theory, and Christians should be free to test this theory to see if it corresponds with the data and phenomena of Scripture. Theories should then be amended or discarded altogether. Ultimately, Enns would rather see inerrancy “scrapped” as a theory of what the Bible is and does.¹²⁷

Position 9: Biblical Authority

Like position eight, position nine is an anti-inerrantist position that goes a step further by rejecting biblical revelation. Nevertheless, adherents of position nine still believe that readers can encounter God through the Bible. Though proponents affirm the presence of errors in the Bible, they do not think that error inhibits Scripture’s principal function of leading people to God and salvation. Likewise, the presence of errors does not inhibit the Bible’s authority as a sacred text. According to Dockery, “an existential or encounter view of truth” is central to this position as a means of God communicating with humanity. For Dockery, the main problem with position nine is its focus on the humanity of Scripture at the expense of its divinity.¹²⁸

Dockery lists *Biblical Authority or Biblical Tyranny? Scripture and the Christian Pilgrimage* by William Countryman as an example of position nine.¹²⁹ As Countryman outlines, the Bible is an authority for many Christians, yet many disagree about what kind of authority it is.¹³⁰ Countryman, nonetheless, states that the Bible is authoritative and God’s word. For him, it is central to Christianity, yet Christians should explore the Bible in relation to its function.¹³¹ According to Countryman, “the greatest enemy of a true reading of Scripture is simply a false estimate of what the Bible really is”.¹³² Countryman accepts the Bible’s errors in terms of history, science, and even “contradictions

¹²⁶ Op. cit. 84.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ DOCKERY 1986, 11.

¹²⁹ COUNTRYMAN, William (1982): *Biblical Authority or Biblical Tyranny? Scripture and the Christian Pilgrimage*. Philadelphia, Fortress Press.

¹³⁰ COUNTRYMAN 1982, ix.

¹³¹ Op. cit. x.

¹³² Op. cit. 123.

in matters of belief and morality”.¹³³ Since humanity is “bound by time and space”,¹³⁴ the Bible’s fallibility is an inevitable part of God’s communication.

The Spectrum of Inerrancy

As we have seen, there are many variations of inerrancy, ranging from conservative to progressive. Dockery’s groups and positions work together. Each group functions relative to its presuppositional commitments. While most Christians certainly believe in the Bible’s truthfulness, they disagree in defining inerrancy and biblical authority. Some Christians are open to critical methodologies and to re-evaluating their conception of Scripture, relegating inerrancy to specific aspects of the Bible, such as salvation, ethics, morality, or particular genres. The variations exist on a spectrum (See Table 2 – *The Spectrum of Inerrancy*, page 21), with some evangelicals taking a deductive approach to Scripture and others taking an inductive approach.

At one end of the spectrum is mechanical dictation, a fundamentalist position that takes a defensive stance towards biblical scholarship. As noted earlier, mechanical dictation is a rare position within evangelicalism, and it is the only position connected with the fundamentalist group. This position is perhaps the most hard-line inerrantist stance in the inerrancy debate.

Absolute inerrancy and critical inerrancy are evangelical positions. Though not as hard-line as the fundamentalist group, the evangelical group is nonetheless a conservative form of Protestantism that maintains a high view of biblical authority. Two primary differences between fundamentalists and evangelicals (as understood by Dockery) are that evangelicals are neither separatist nor anti-intellectual. Evangelicals engage biblical scholarship, whereas fundamentalists typically reject it. Absolute inerrancy and critical inerrancy are quite similar; however, critical inerrantists are more open to biblical scholarship than absolute inerrantists. Regardless, both absolute and critical inerrantists approach the Bible deductively.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Countryman is perfectly comfortable with describing the worldview portrayed in the Bible as “quite wrong”, stating that it is completely normal for us to admit the fallibility of the Bible. See op. cit. 3.

Next, limited inerrancy, nuanced inerrancy, qualified inerrancy, and functional inerrancy are moderate positions. Moderates are more varied than the other three positions, containing four variations. Moderates relegate inerrancy to specific texts or themes in the Bible. For example, limited inerrantists relegate inerrancy to matters of faith, salvation, ethics, and things that can be empirically validated. Qualified inerrantists are similar but maintain that inerrancy is a faith commitment not dependent on rational propositionalism. Nuanced inerrantists believe that only specific texts in the Bible are inerrant. Moreover, functional inerrantists relegate the Bible's inerrancy entirely to salvation. While moderate positions can be somewhat challenging to distinguish, they reveal the complexity of inerrancy in evangelical Christianity. Compared to fundamentalist and evangelical positions, moderates typically approach the Bible inductively and are therefore easier for critical scholars to engage in dialogue.

Finally, position eight (inerrancy is irrelevant) and position nine (biblical authority) are liberal positions advocating a progressive understanding of Scripture. For Dockery, liberals are the far-left counterpart to fundamentalists, which he describes as far-right. Whereas fundamentalists focus on the divine aspects of Scripture to the detriment of its human elements, liberals do the opposite by concentrating on the humanity of Scripture and virtually ignoring its divinity. Liberals also favour subjective rather than objective readings of Scripture.

Position eight rejects inerrancy, seeing it as irrelevant and a cause for disunity among evangelicals. Adherents of position eight believe that evangelicals should abandon inerrancy as a hermeneutic. Perhaps more strikingly, position nine rejects divine inspiration, taking an opposite view compared to mechanical dictation. For adherents of position nine, Christians encounter God through Scripture, yet for them God did not inspire Scripture. Nonetheless, they uphold the Bible as authoritative for the Christian faith.

Concluding Thoughts

Dockery's variations of inerrancy are brief but immensely helpful. He illustrates the complexity of inerrancy and anti-inerrancy. Inerrantists and anti-inerrantists fall on a spectrum of those who adhere to conservative positions on one side and those who adhere to liberal positions on the other side. Nonetheless, Dockery's descriptions are

not without problems. As briefly mentioned, it can be difficult to distinguish between the various nuances among proponents, especially with limited inerrancy, qualified inerrancy, nuanced inerrancy, and, to a certain extent, functional inerrancy. Additionally, Dockery's variations only scratch the surface in terms of the inerrancy debate and its many positions. Yet, despite these issues, Dockery provides an invaluable source for demonstrating the complexity of inerrancy, which hopefully provides a way forward for critics by illuminating the importance of adequately understanding and representing the many positions in the debate.

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